

P Y R A M I D

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A NOVEL BY

LIONEL BIRCH

PHILIP ALLAN
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TO

L. C. AND R. C.

WHOSE KINDNESS TO ME HAS BEEN
INFINITE

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This book does not purpose to be a 'Public School story' in the accepted sense of that phrase. It is primarily intended as a study of the development, particularly of the emotional development, of a boy, in the usual school surroundings. Those surroundings are therefore only lightly and typically sketched in. And all the characters and all the communities in this book are, therefore, entirely fictitious.

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I

THE PREP. SCHOOL

I

TOGETHER, How and Roretон followed Mr. Lanbury into the study. What, they asked themselves, had they done now. They were not in the habit of drawing pictures in their books ; they had not talked after lights-out. But there was, of course, always the chance that a ' Damn ' might have slipped out somewhere within hearing of a monitor. They had been reported. Obviously. But still they did not understand.

Mr. Lanbury closed the door with scrupulous care, and turned importantly towards the two.

" Go through to the Fourth Form room," he said.
" Mr. Stethens wishes to speak to you."

Mr. Stethens wishes to speak to you !

Now they did understand. So it was true about the author of that idiotic rhyme ! The dramatic trait in Roretон's character reacted instantly to the situation.

" Don't look him in the eyes, Phil," he whispered, in the passage. But, once inside the room, they both found that the theatrical element in human nature made them return Mr. Stethens's stare of restrained power with such sturdiness as they could muster. It was the first time that Tony had formulated to himself his inborn repugnance for the extremely masculine type of man - what in after years he came to refer to as ' the hundred per cent. chap.' Mr. Stethens was standing with his hands behind him ; and they noticed that, as they came

in, he threw away a cigarette which he had only half smoked.

"Sit down," he said ; and Tony felt for a chair and drew it beneath him.

"It is a pity that I have to speak to you on the day before your confirmation," he began.

"But," he went on, after an impressive pause, "I have to speak to you on a matter which I could not, for some time, believe, but which I have at last been compelled to believe."

Again Mr. Stethens paused for a glance out of the window. Then, focusing his stare directly on Tony, he said :

"It has come to my ears that you two are in the habit of kissing each other. Is that so ?"

Half defiantly, half innocently, Tony nodded.

"Yes, sir," said Phil.

"Is that so, Roretton ?" Mr. Stethens demanded mercilessly.

"Yes," said Tony, and was immediately seized with a desire to burst into tears.

For a few seconds Mr. Stethens considered the top of the greenhouse in the garden. Then :

"Can't you see what a soft, unmanly thing to do it is ?" he said. "Do you think, How, that your father would like to see you kissing ?"

Phil bit his lip and murmured something about not knowing ; and Tony underwent a fleeting and distasteful picture of Colonel How — another of these big strong men that made him feel so uncomfortable.

"Very few fathers kiss their sons after they've gone to school," said Mr. Stethens, "and" — a quiet cough at this point — "and it's not right for two boys like you to kiss each other. Do you see ?"

No answer in words reached him.

"I want you to promise me, then," he went on, "that you will never kiss each other again. Will you promise me that ?"

The glance which passed between Tony and Phil indicated that they had both determined on the surrender.

Simultaneously : "Yes, sir," said Phil, and, "I promise, sir," said Tony.

"Well, that's all over and done with," said Mr. Stethens judicially ; and then, as they got up to go, "Of course," he remarked cheerily, and as if in part compensation, "of course, the last thing I want to do is to stop you being friends."

Once in the passage again : "Did he make you feel an ass, Phil ?" asked Tony.

Philip smiled.

"No," he said simply.

But of the two joint Headmasters of this preparatory school how infinitely now he preferred Mr. Lanbury.

2

Just before the dormitory bell rang that night, Mrs. Lanbury appeared in Big School and desired that Roretton should come and see her. Mrs. Lanbury was a metallic woman, afflicted, from youth up, with curiosity and Ideas. She wore grey, masculine ties and blouses that seemed to hanker after being shirts. She had a passion for 'hardiness.' All the masters, her husband included, found her interfering. She positively bullied Mr. Simson.

She carried Tony off with her into the drawing-room ; produced a square of Swiss chocolate from a perfectly respectable-looking cupboard ; and, with a nod of seductive omniscience, offered it to him. When he had eaten it up, "Run along now, Anthony," she said. "And you understand, don't you, that ALL THAT is a *shut book* ?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lanbury."

"Very well, Anthony, and will you ask Philip How to come and see me?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lanbury."

On consideration, Tony decided that ALL THAT was more likely to represent his intimacy with Phil than the square of Swiss chocolate. This decision he communicated to Philip, who knocked duly on the drawing-room door ; accepted and ate the chocolate ; and said :

"Yes, Mrs. Lanbury," when she repeated the mystic formula about the 'shut book.'

The bell rang ; the lights were turned down in the big dormitory. As was their custom, Tony and Phil waved good-night to each other across the room. For November, the night was stuffy. Tony was too tired to sleep. At last, full of misery for an injunction which he did not understand, he buried his head in the pillow and wept quietly to himself. He would have liked to have been able to talk it over with Phil. But Phil was asleep. And very painfully it was borne in upon him that, however often now he might feel that inexplicable attraction, he must never again lay his head against Phil's, and listen to Phil's laughter, and his alluring way of pronouncing all his r's as w's. Never again. Why ?

He did not understand.

He was fond of Phil, desperately fond of him, just as his mother was fond of *him*. Because his mother was fond of him she kissed him. Why shouldn't he kiss Phil ? He did not understand. It was all rather difficult.

And he remembered the happiness of the last two terms ; and marvelled at the sufficiency of Phil and himself. And he wondered why Phil, who had once been the hero-athlete of the school, had lost all his popularity as their acquaintanceship had grown ; and why anyone should have lacked understanding in such a degree that

they could write such a rhyme as that ; and why he could not explain all this to Phil's mother, whom he had only seen four times, but whom he loved almost more than his own mother. And finally he wondered why he must never again toy with the exciting word 'love.' And a little drowsily he explained to himself that it was because he had made some promise to Mr. Stethens, who had said that it was a soft thing to do.

Why soft ? He did not understand.

(But Mr. Stethens had said it was unmanly ; and Mr. Stethens was the manliest of men.)

And then he remembered that he was to be confirmed on the morrow. And the heaviness of sorrow and great weariness closed round and over him ; and very secretly he cried himself to sleep.

II

IN THE BEGINNING

I

TONY felt immensely at home in the study that next evening. Mr. Smith was still in his shooting clothes. His boots looked muddy and comfortable. His gun was standing against the table ; and his cartridge-bag lay on the floor beside it. He rested his pipe upon the ash-tray of the writing-table, and, turning with a smile to Tony, said : " Shall we kneel down ? "

Tony found himself, quite suddenly, exceedingly happy ; and when he realised that he was actually kneeling between the gun and the cartridges he wanted to shout for joy. Prayer, in these surroundings, seemed very real.

There was half a minute of silence. Then, in a curiously conversational tone, Mr. Smith said :

" O Lord, hear our prayer, and let our cry come unto Thee. Send us this day Thy Holy Spirit, that it may bring unto us :

*Beauty for Ashes,
The Oil of Joy for Mourning,
And the Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness."*

" Amen," said Tony sincerely.

Mr. Smith stood up.

" I think I must go and change now," he said. " Good luck." And, as Tony shook gratefully the hand offered to him, he was surprised to find himself feeling not the

least bit foolish. As a rule, hand-shaking, other than in greeting or farewell, affected him in the same way as a piece of bad melodrama. It made him feel supremely ridiculous. But somehow this was different.

2

There was hardly anyone in the large Gothic church when Tony and his party arrived ; but along the dim curves of the roof the fluttering of the candles cast eager shadows that danced and beckoned like arabesques.

Tony was glad that it was evening. There were no hard curves but they grew gentler in the evening. There were no hard faces but they were softened by candlelight. There were no rough edges but they smoothed themselves out at sundown. There were no jagged ends but they were rounded by the coaxing of the moon. There was less of deceit at evening ; and more of truth. Less of tumult ; and more of tranquillity. Less of passion ; and more of love.

They said that time healed all things. That was not true. It was evening that healed all things.

A man in black showed Tony to his pew ; and, as he bowed his head in his hands, there came to him those lines of Dowson's, which only a week ago he had learned for repetition :

*Outside the world is wild and passionate ;
Man's weary laughter and his sick despair
Entreat at their impenetrable gate :
They heed no voices in their dream of prayer.*

Tony had hardly read half way through the pamphlet which had been given him to use when the female candidates came down the aisle, a choir of truant angels in

their white and flowing headdress. The organ droned out. Looking round, Tony found that the church was now quite full, and that the first choir-boys were already peeping through the vestry door. They were to sing : ' Come, Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost.' "Probably," thought Tony, "there has never been such singing as this."

Like figures of a dream, they moved down the aisle, the choir, the Vicar in his white hood, the bearer with his mace — and last of all the Bishop. The Bishop in motion, a character from *Lohengrin*. The Bishop standing, a pillar of flamboyant scarlet against the terrifying whiteness of the altar of his God. And, as he turned to face the people, Tony noticed admiringly the firmly cut lines of his mouth, and the perpetual greyness of his eyes and hair.

In a moment it seemed that the preambles were finished, and the candidates from the first row were kneeling before the Bishop. The nine weeks of his preparation flashed synoptically back before Tony ; and, with an eagerness hitherto unknown, he prayed for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A verger touched him on the shoulder. He started up, half fearful that he had been praying aloud. There were only six people now between the Bishop and himself. He met the glance of the Vicar, who stood by the Bishop's chair, and wondered if the Vicar were praying for him. He considered earnestly whether, in two minutes' time, he would rise from his knees with the gift of tongues or with the strength of ten. And even as he thought of this he found himself kneeling, with the Bishop's two hands upon his head. He wondered why the Bishop was pressing down so hard upon him. And then, like a bell in his ear, he heard the words he knew so well :

" Defend, O Lord, this Thy child with Thy heavenly

grace, that he may continue Thine for ever ; and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto Thy everlasting kingdom."

Each word seemed to burn itself into him, through the hands which were held so firmly to the top of his head. Half-dazed, he rose from his knees and knelt down again in his own place.

The Laying-on of Hands was finished. They were to sing the hymn : ' Thine for ever, God of Love.'

Tony collected himself and stood up. Why, he asked himself, was it that hymn that they had chosen — the hymn that was sacred to Phil ? Vaguely, he wondered whether it would be blasphemous to think of Phil while he was singing it. He had grown so used to looking for references to the story of Phil and himself in the psalms and hymns that it would be hard to fix his attention. Doubtful and hesitating, he came somehow through the hymn ; and the Bishop was now going to make his address.

Tony never forgot that address ; it was all so directly applicable. And especially did he remember the conclusion :

" Therefore I say to you : remember that you have this day received God. And God is Love. Remember that you brought into the world nothing ; and nothing shall you take out with you again.

" See to it, then, that of all the manifold things that have been given you for your use, you withhold nothing. Above all, see that you withhold not love. For by so doing you will withhold God.

" Remember that in the Day of Judgment, as a wise man has said, it will not be the sins that we have committed that will convict us. But by the things we have not done, by the cups of water we have failed to offer, by the love we have not given, we shall stand condemned of Indifference before the unpitied hearts of men.

No other indictment than Indifference shall be issued against us. And in that last day, the ultimate test of Goodness will be not Churchmanship, but Love.

"For now in you abideth Faith, Hope, Love, these three ; but the greatest of these is Love."

So it was over. And, very unwillingly, Tony walked down the aisle and out of the church door.

Very hurriedly, when he arrived back at the vicarage, he undressed and knelt down, and great words of happiness bubbled from his heart. And he thanked God for His Beauty and Majesty ; and for everything in general ; and for Phil in particular.

And, as he fell asleep, he wondered why he wasn't really so different after all from the Tony of that morning. Could there have been something missing ? And quickly he told himself that it didn't matter, because, different or the same, he still had Phil. (And surely he must always have Phil.) Phil was enough to him, and he knew he was enough to Phil. That was perfection ; that was his ideal. And he thought of the mean jingle that had been concocted in the hope of making Phil and him feel ridiculous. Slowly, caressingly, he said it over to himself :

*"Two little birdies sitting on a bough;
One called Roretton, the other called How."*

Now, in the light of all that had passed that day, this stupid rhyme sounded to Tony like a paean, a triumph-song ; a great shout of victory — a gesture of pity for those whose hearts were clever enough to jeer but not to understand.

A triumph song ; for it meant that the mockers recognised that an ideal had been gained ; that one more David had found a Jonathan.

3

A week later Tony went home. At the station, Jones met him with the Daimler.

As the car swung through the drive gates, Tony noticed that there was a thin layer of ice over the Low Pool. Many were the afternoons that he sat watching a float near one or other of that chain of pools. Round the next bend of the drive he heard the whir of the sawmill coming from the stream which connected the pools with the lake. A pheasant rose noisily from the bracken, and flew over the drive and the water to the wooded hillside beyond. The car pulled up the last slope and turned through a second and more portentous pair of stone gates. In the massive three-arched porch Lewis the butler was waiting to open the door of the car.

"Hullo, Lewis. How are you ? "

"How do you do, sir ? We are very pleased to see you back again."

Lewis used the royal 'we' by instinct.

Tony walked through the huge trophy-hung hall into the smoking-room.

His father was sitting in a chair by the fire, apparently reading the *New Statesman*.

"Why, it's you is it, Tony ? Come along and get warm. Have you had a good term ? "

"Quite, thanks, father."

"Well, that's capital. I hear that you had a good confirmation."

"Yes, quite a good confirmation, father," said Tony fatuously.

"Good. . . . Well, we're going to shoot the coverts tomorrow. And I've got a little four-ten that I want you to try."

"Oh, that's fine, father. That's splendid."

Lewis came into the room.

"Hodge has just come up, sir."

"Oh, all right, Lewis. Tell him I'll see him in a moment."

"I'll just go and see about to-morrow's arrangements, Tony, and then I expect mother will be in for tea." And Mr. Roretton went out of the room to see the keeper.

Tony sat down on the sofa and sank luxuriously into its cushions. He was fond of the smoking-room and not a little proud of it. He enjoyed the wide brick fireplace, with its wood fire. He admired the head of the huge moose which his grandfather had shot in Canada and which now hung over the mantelpiece. Though there had been a time, he remembered, when it had frightened him a good deal. He was never tired of looking at the antlers and shields and assegais which were hung everywhere on the walls ; and the stuffed brown bears which held the electric light bulbs fascinated, even though they had ceased to frighten him. But above all he liked the smell so peculiar to this high smoking-room of Burnans, a smell which seemed to be compounded half of cigar ash and half of the wood cinders which increased and multiplied eternally on the hearth.

Lewis laid the tea-things. And Mrs. Roretton came in from the park. There was not much conversation over the tea-table. One of the 'guns' for the following day had wired to say that he couldn't come.

Francis Roretton came of a race of people that still survives in certain parts of England. It is a quietly fine race of people, that treads softly over soft carpets for the greater number of its days, and is unquiet only when it is galloping over grass or plough. The Rorettons lived quietly and died quietly. And when one of them was let down into the family vault, another was at hand to step up into the saddle ; and the farmers over whose land they rode

were none the wiser ; and the villagers, when the bell had finished tolling, thought again of other things.

Mr. Roretton's oval and curiously unwrinkled face always reminded Tony of one of those Norman knights that lay so reposefully on the tombs in Burnans church. A handsome, if undistinguished, face, made dignified by a curving, white moustache.

A placid face. And Mr. Roretton's life had not been boisterous. In his youth he had been an excellent polo player. In middle age he had stood as a Parliamentary candidate, and only the militant, aggressive honesty of his speeches had kept him out of the House of Commons.

Since that day, nineteen years ago, when he had been defeated by a Liberal candidate of dubious origins, Mr. Roretton had lived most of the year round at Burnans, surrounded by half a dozen retainers, whom he traditionally overpaid. Each of these retainers was, in his own province, expert. And there were times when Mr. Roretton availed himself of their deferentially insinuated opinions. In June he sometimes visited Hurlingham. In August he occasionally went down to Cowes. At Christmas he never failed to send a sack of coal to all the sober families in the village. On Sundays he generally went to the morning service.

For centuries the villagers had been devoted to the Roretton family, though they generally failed to differentiate between its members.

Francis Roretton had met his wife sixteen years before on a business tour in Canada, and had brought back to Burnans the first foreign bride that the place had known. But Mrs. Roretton had soon thrown off her Canadian-ness and grown into the likeness of an English gentlewoman of the old type, with a natural warmth of heart that was forever breaking through her traditional dignity. For a little while, after her marriage, she paid flying visits to

Canada at intervals of two years. But from the time that Tony started going to school she had not left the country, except to go, in the February of each year, to Cannes.

After tea Tony walked out into the arcade. Burnans Manor was a big castellated manor house, built out of local granite-stone. The main building, which was crowned by three turrets, was connected with the clock tower by a stone arcade, with a gallery running along over the top of it. It was Tony's idea of the castle of fiction. It stood high up above the river ; and the space between the house and the water was laid out in sweeping formal terraces. Tony walked along and stood on the edge of the top terrace, and looked down over the stream a mile away below him on to the top of the pinewoods which sloped staidly upwards on the further bank.

It was getting dark very quickly. Slowly Tony walked along the small stone statuettes of Roman and Athenian gods and goddesses which poised themselves on the edge of the terrace, sprouting despondently at intervals from the barbarian soil. Better than anything else in the place they seemed to sympathise with him.

The next day was Sunday, a day on which it was customary for the family to attend the morning service. Ten weeks' unreserved discussion with Mr. Smith had made Tony uneasy about the code used at Burnans, whereby one got up in one's second-best London suit ; and went to the eleven o'clock service in a bowler hat ; and retailed into the cautious plate the graded modicum, doled out, during the third hymn, by paterfamilias ; and criticised the sermon over a cold lunch ("to save the servants, my dear,") and sat about all the afternoon pulling the Church of England to pieces ; and prided oneself all the evening that one was not playing bridge.

But the lot of a thirteen-year-old disciple of Christianity is no easy one. And while Mrs. Roretton tolerated her

son's request to be called at 6.30 in order to go to the eight o'clock service in the village church, Mr. Roretton put his spurred and booted foot down ponderously when Tony enquired at what time the Vicar of Burnans heard confessions.

" You can go and get the Pope to adopt you, as far as I am concerned," said Mr. Roretton with finality. " But you can't sit and talk Popery in my drawing-room."

" I don't know, dear," said Mrs. Roretton quietly, after her husband had left the room " whether I *quite* like the idea of your going and telling your faults to a man. You know, dear, it is so exactly what these Romans do."

" But, mummy, confession is just as much open to us as it is to Roman Catholics. Besides, I shouldn't be telling my sins to a man."

Mrs. Roretton had brought no religious convictions over with her from her Canadian home. She had assumed the appearance of a Christian as deftly and as naturally as she had assumed the appearance of an English gentlewoman.

4

The next two terms passed quickly. Tony remembered them only as a series of delightful incidents :

Spring in the garden at Meston, with the birds' new, romantic voices, and the smell of grass sprinkled with April rain ; and walks on the dusty white roads, between hedges bursting with buds of green ; and afternoons spent strolling with Phil along the cliffs above the sea ; and bathing in the bay in the earliest morning ; and lying on the shingle, burning blotting-paper with a magnifying glass in the light of the evening sun. It was all beautiful, and all carefree. Phil had already passed into Hatton, and Tony had already won a scholarship at Towers Hill.

And then there was the discovery of Tennyson and of Brooke.

And there were the conversations with Lucas ; who had been confirmed for more than a year, and who understood all about vestments and incense and Thomas à Kempis. It was through Lucas that Tony decided one Wednesday to start going to confession on the following Saturday. They were not entirely pleasant, those intervening two days. On the one hand, Tony doubted whether he would ever be able to say anything when he actually found himself kneeling before the priest ; doubted whether he would make a true confession and not a theatrical one ; doubted whether Mr. Smith would maintain his high opinion of him ; while on the other he realised that a good confession and an audible absolution would make his peace of mind profounder, and his communions more mystic and real.

Saturday morning came ; and he decided definitely to go and confess that evening. In the afternoon there was to be a cricket match against Bowden Grange. Tony was very fond of cricket, and as captain of Meston had been a distinct success. To-day, however, he was out of luck. He had made five confident runs when the first change-bowler — a left-hander — was put on. Bowling round the wicket, and down a big wind, his first ball to Tony was a full toss which swung in suddenly and late, and Tony only managed to get an edge of the bat to the ball. It just snicked the wood, and went on to hit him full on the left pad, which had been placed correctly in front of all three stumps. The two clicks were almost simultaneous. The bowler turned and shouted his appeal at the umpire, full into the wind. The umpire's finger half rose and straightened itself at him. Annoyed at the decision, Tony could not resist a compensation in the theatrical. Stooping down, he picked from the pitch a small shaving of

wood that the last snick had broken off the side of his bat ; and as he passed the offending umpire he put the shaving, with a half-gesture, back into its place in the bat.

Meston were all out for 53. But Tony bowled well, so that Bowden lost five of their wickets for 25, and all ten for 31. Tony became more cheerful. After tea, Lucas came up and asked him whether he would like to go first or last to the chapel.

But somehow Tony had felt different since the match.

"I don't think I'll come to-night, after all," he said spontaneously. "I'm sorry, Lucas."

And, curiously enough, he did not, on the following morning, regret his decision.

5

But particularly did Tony remember his last week at Meston ; and how he was never divided from Phil if he could help it ; and how he tried to tell Phil how he would miss him ; and how much he would give to be going to Hatton ; but how quite sensible thoughts sounded sentimental and ridiculous when transformed into words. And all the time Phil did not say much ; but Tony knew that he was feeling a good deal ; and Tony was exceeding happy.

And he remembered how the time came to him, as he had seen it come to so many others, when he was called into Mr. Lanbury's study ; and how, after an hour, he came out again into the throng of many timid enquiring eyes, and a few bolder, inquisitive lips, and heard the question he had so often asked :

"What did he say ?"

"What happens ?"

"Does he want me now ?"

And he remembered the pleasure it had given him to be able to shrug his shoulders a little too casually, and remark, with perfect stage-nonchalance :

" Oh, I don't know. Nothing in particular."

And how it had amused him to think that one more initiate had kept the vow.

And he used to think of the Scripture prep. which Mr. Simmons took that evening ; and of the boy in the second form who put up his hand and said :

" Sir," and again, a little louder, " Sir."

" Well," said Mr. Simmons testily, " what is it, Larkin ? "

" Please, sir," continued Larkin, " when Abraham had a son, when he already had two wives, how did they know which of the two the son belonged to, sir ? "

Every head was raised. The two boys on either side looked pityingly at Larkin. Mr. Simmons took out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and, just as Tony remembered not to put his hand up, made the somewhat unconvincing answer :

" Oh, I don't think they'd have much difficulty over that."

And Tony would often think of his last night at Meston ; of how he woke up at six o'clock, and went and knelt by Phil's bed ; and stayed there gazing entranced at the boy for whom his affection had blotted out every consideration ; and he remembered how it was borne in upon him at that hour that the thing of which life had consisted was even now about to be cut out of life ; and how he supposed that there would be an existence after this morning, but he was not quite sure ; and how the dawn crept in by stealth, and surprised a tear on his cheek ; and how he conceived a fierce jealousy against all those unknown people who would see Phil every day in the future, and would not realise their luck ; and an especial savage

hatred for those who would try to love Phil as he had loved him.

And he thought of how he had said good-bye to Phil. Once at the door of the school ; and again on the platform ; and a third time as the train started to move.

And lastly he remembered how, as he had walked back to Meston, he had prayed, most earnestly, for death.

III

TOWERS HILL

I

"BUT I would much rather arrive there by myself, mummy."

"No, dear. It's quite right to want to feel independent. But daddy's going to take you, because he wants to have a talk to the housemaster."

Tony pouted, and put his new tweed cap sullenly on his head.

"And now do just go and say good-bye to cook, and thank her for making you a cake."

And so it had come about that, on an afternoon in late September, a smart but gentlemanly limousine drove up to the gate of Jennings's House, Towers Hill, and disgorged in hurried succession a brand-new trunk, a tuck-box, Mr. Roretton, several brown-paper parcels of which Tony was heartily ashamed, and finally Tony himself. One last effort was made to prevent Mr. Roretton coming into the house.

"Well, thank you so much for bringing me, daddy."

"Oh, not at all, Tony. I just want to have one word with old What's-his-name." In a whisper : "Don't forget just to say good-bye to Jones."

As they turned to go in, there on the doorstep they saw Mr. Jennings himself. Tony remembered him from the time of his scholarship examination, a tall, stubble-haired man of about thirty-five, with the quiet manner that insinuates itself at birth into the eldest son of a country

vicar, but with that underlying assurance which is bred only from the acquisition of a full Blue.

"How do you do, Mr. Jennings ?"

Tony looked at the two men as they shook hands—two not unworthy representatives of their different traditions. His father, warm, white-haired, Norman-looking, and chivalrous. His housemaster, cold, intellectualised, and severely Roman.

Mr. Roretton refused tea ; and with relief Tony followed Mr. Jennings to the drawing-room, where his housemaster had already herded together the seven other new boys and those few parents who had not been prevented by their sons from entering the House. The crisp, uncrinkled chintz and the lack of spiritual warmth in the drawing-room acquitted Mr. Jennings of the housemaster's crime of marriage. The male parent with the butterfly collar and diffident wife, and the unattached female parent with her all but h-less son, Henry, convicted him of carelessness in the selection of candidates for his house. Tony found himself a little jarred, and more than a little glad that his father had not consented to come and drink tea.

Armed with a blue, precarious tea-cup, and a shaving of elegant bread-and-butter, he took stock of the other new boys. There was the one addressed as Paddon, who had evidently made Mr. Jennings's acquaintance in the holidays, and was being proportionately industrious with a plate of cucumber sandwiches. There was Mathews, who had had a brother in the House and therefore understood These Things ; and who demonstrated his Higher Understanding by keeping a running fire of questions in what was presumably college jargon. There was the son of the man whose neckwear had first caught Tony's eye, the man who was even now stepping into the conversational gap with the observation : "It seems to me as how

the weather is adapting itself more to cricket than to football."

To which, with magnificent irrelevance, Mr. Jennings was replying :

" Yes. My House won the Cricket Cup last term ; to be kept for a year of course you know."

Tony's sickening gaze wandered on, and discovered the remaining three of his ' brothers ' to be more reasonable — or at least less spotted in face, and less impeded in speech.

An inaudible sentence from Mr. Jennings had been correctly interpreted by Paddon as meaning that they were free to go to the other side of the House. Tony found himself in rather a dark passage, cut at symmetrical intervals by bare unattractive ' studies,' which reminded him inevitably of the loose-boxes in the stables at home. On a notice-board Tony found his name written in typed letters as being an inmate of Number 3 study. Very stealthily he made his way along to the door which displayed the figure 3 ; but, hearing voices within, he retired to the windows in the passage, where he spent the next half-hour plucking nervously at the blindcord.

At half-past six a taxi drew up at the side-door, and the first non-new boy burst into the passage. Tony was amazed to see that he was actually less tall than himself ; but he was awed to notice the Homburg hat which all but obscured the wearer's right eye. And he vowed to record in his Sunday letter that his mother *had* been quite wrong, after all, to insist on his wearing a tweed cap.

More and more people began to arrive by the side-door opening into the passage ; and Tony was relieved to find that they hardly appeared to notice him. In fact, so comparatively unconcerned about himself did he become that he felt almost sympathetic on hearing the exclamation of a newly arrived fair-haired youth :

" Good God ! That must be the other Mathews ! "

Presently, to Tony's amazement, a very tall boy came up, and with a most kindly smile remarked :

" Aren't you Roretton ? "

" Yes," said Tony, in grateful wonderment at this Person, who, though surely one of the prefects, had yet unearthed his name.

" Well, this is your study in here," continued the other, leading the way into Number 3, and so causing another boy who was unpacking his handbag to turn round suddenly.

" If you want anything," continued the tall one, as he was going out, " ask that man. His name's Curtis."

But the spirit of Curtis, either from shyness or contempt, moved him to leave the study.

" Don't forget to turn the lights off," he called over his shoulder, " and if you want the lats, they're at the end of the passage."

Tony did not particularly want the lats ; but, after reverently turning off the light, he proceeded to the end of the passage. If one was definitely going somewhere, people would think that one at least had an object to one's life. A bell rang. People began to collect at the door of what proved to be the dining-hall. Tony found himself and the other new boys huddled together against the wall, at the end of the room opposite to Mr. Jennings ; behind whom stood four giants and a lesser giant, who must surely be the real prefects. Looking at them, he was concerned to find that his tall benefactor was not among them.

The boy who had worn the Homburg hat over his right eye gave Tony a pamphlet, which he opened curiously. It proved to be a prayer-card containing the hymn : ' O God, our help in ages past,' some prosaic responses, and some scholarly prayers. Tony sang the hymn with his head raised, half wishing to make it clear that he knew the words by heart. He supposed that he

was not singing too loudly ; but somehow he felt uncomfortably sure that Mr. Jennings was staring full at him.

The House knelt for the prayers, and rose to its feet again. Another bell rang. People began to go upstairs. Curtis found Tony eddying about at the top.

"What bedder are you in ?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm afraid I don't know," Tony admitted shame-facedly.

"Oh, well, I expect you'll be in the big one. Come on," said Curtis. "Yes," he continued, stopping before a door, "Christy's bedder. You'll find your bed labelled. Good night."

Tony noticed that the entire bedroom was arranged in accordance with the text-books on hygiene, and that the walls were painted a tiresomely clean shade of green. One whom he had seen among the giants, and whom he presumed to be Christy, asked him his name. Apart from this, he undressed unmolested ; and, when he saw Christy kneel down beside his bed, he said his prayers.

The lights were turned out. And, after listening for a little to a superficial conversation about girls and holidays, and wondering slightly that he had not been required to sing a song, Tony covered his ears with the sheets and thanked heaven for the inviolate sanctuary of Sleep.

2

Tony awoke imagining himself at home. He lay with his eyes shut, expecting every second to hear Lewis remark : "A fine morning, sir. And you'll be wearing your brown plus fours, I expect."

A bell rang. Tony sat up abruptly. He remembered. Opposite him, Christy was in the first stages of waking up.

Tony glanced up the bedroom. He seemed to be the only one awake.

"First bell?" Christy demanded suddenly. No answer.

"Is that the first bell?" he repeated, rubbing his eyes. Tony lay back against his pillow and pretended to be asleep. From some way up the bedroom someone said "Yes." Christy grunted and turned over on the other side. About ten minutes later another bell rang. Instantly everyone sprang out of bed. Tony copied the others. Only Christy lay unmoved, apparently still sleeping. Later, at five minutes to nine, someone said :

"Oughtn't we to wake Christy?"

"Perhaps we ought. Christy!"

Christy turned over lazily.

"Time?" he said.

"Five to."

"Then why the hell did you wake me?"

For another two minutes Christy remained in his attitude of sleep. At last, at three minutes to breakfast-time, he leapt suddenly out of bed and began to dress. Tony stared reverently. Christy put on all his clothes in two pieces ; and had cleaned his teeth and knelt to say his prayers before the bell for breakfast went.

There was another call-over before breakfast. Then, just after the House had sat down, a small boy with very fair, unbrushed hair came into Hall. Tony wondered what Jennings would do. The boy seemed about to sit down at his table.

"Malone!"

Jennings had called him up. Tony watched his house-master speaking in an undertone to the unkempt Malone, who walked out of the room, to return a minute later with his hair brushed. Tony was profoundly thankful that it wasn't he himself that had attracted all this attention.

After breakfast, Curtis came up to him.

"Cameron wants you in Captain's study," he said.

"Why?" said Tony nervously.

"My good man, I don't know."

"What do I do?"

"Oh! Just knock, and they'll call you in."

Timidly Tony went upstairs and stopped outside the door of Captain's study. The people in the library were making a noise, and Tony was afraid that he would not be able to hear the "Come in."

At last he knocked. Instantly a burst of laughter came from the reading-room. Desperately he knocked again. A ferocious yell from the other side of the door greeted him. He opened the door and walked in. Four faces were staring at him.

"Why can't you come . . . Oh, it's you, is it, Roreton?"

"Yes," said Tony. He supposed he was speaking to Cameron.

"Well, I want you and Malone to tidy up this room every morning."

Tony glanced round the room, and found the boy whose hair had been unbrushed standing by the window looking towards him.

"You begin to-morrow," Christy was saying. "D'you see?"

"Yes."

"All right. You can go, Malone. And, Roreton, when you come in here, you need only knock once."

"Yes. Thank you."

Tony went out of the room. In the library outside, Tony met Curtis.

"Did you call him 'sir,' Roreton?"

"No," said Tony. "Ought I to?"

"Good Lord," said Curtis, "didn't you really?"

"Should I?" said Tony meekly.

"My good man . . ." Curtis demonstrated his scorn by walking away. "Oh, incidentally, Roreton," he called back, "you know what to do if you hear 'Boy!' shouted?"

"Yes," said Tony. "Thanks." He did not wish for any more information from Curtis at present.

Fancy not having the sense to say "sir." What a fool he must have looked.

He walked downstairs and looked at the notice-board.

"Fags must play practice rugger three times a week."

"Headmaster's call-over at 11.30."

He walked on along the passage towards his study. At the door he met Curtis, who was evidently acting as guide to a large robust boy with thick black curly hair.

"Oh, Pattinson," said Curtis, "here's another-Roreton."

Pattinson! Tony knew the name. 'Captain of Rugger: W. F. Pattinson.'

Pattinson ran his finger along the sheet of paper he was carrying and turned towards Tony.

"Your name's Roreton, is it?"

"Yes." Tony saw a look of surprise on Curtis's face. He remembered.

"Have you played rugger before?"

"Yessir, a little." Tony allowed the 'sir' to drag on to the 'yes.'

"Where did you play?"

"Well" - Tony was so embarrassed that he could scarcely remember - "mostly inside three-quarter, sir."

"All right." Pattinson began to walk on. "And, incidentally, you needn't call me 'sir,'" he added with an ill-disguised smile.

Tony turned to Curtis in bewilderment.

"Don't I really call him 'sir?'"

"My good man . . ." Curtis laughed.

"Then who *do* I call 'sir'?"

" My good man . . . did I ever say that you ought to call anyone ' sir ' ? "

Tony walked on into his study. There were already about seven people inside it, some sitting on the table and some lounging against the window-sill. Judging by their conversation, they were mostly fags.

Tony began to tidy up his locker. The stray ends of talk meant little to him.

" Three times a week — it's scandalous." " Why, even last Easter we only had to play twice a week." " It's all that man Cameron." " Great red Scotch monster." " No, it's Pattinson that's doing it." " Lord ! Rugger every flaming day." " And fives once a week." " And now this great strafe about swearing. Gad, if you'd been in Roberts's bedroom last year with Cameron, it would have helped your vocabulary a bit." " A bloody term, that's what we're in for."

" Boy ! "

" Don't say that's a ' Boy ' on the first day ! "

" Can't be." " Scandalous if it is."

" Booy." " Booooooy ! "

" Hell !" " Where is it ? " " Basement." Out of the study. Along the passage. Shouting. Swearing. Dazedly Tony followed them as they rushed towards the stairs leading to the changing-rooms. " Out of the way." " Get on, Mathews." " Blast you, Potter." Someone caught Tony by the shoulder ; threw him out of the way. " Boy ! " On down the stairs. Stumbling. Falling. Someone landed on his neck from the flight above. " Booy ! " " Booooooy ! " Round the corner to the basement. " Boy ! "

" Last, please. Why've you all been so long ? Last ! Hurry up."

Awkwardly Tony walked forward. He had fallen at the bottom of the stairs. He was easily last.

" Hurry up." Tony ran along the line of waiting fags. He found Pattinson half changed, with one stocking in his hand.

" Oh, it's you, is it ? " said Pattinson. " Well, I want someone sensible." A titter from the fags. " I mean someone who's not new. Next to last, please." Malone came forward quickly, but pouting.

" I want another pair of stockings from the linen-room, Malone. All right, the rest."

Tony wandered back into the passage. Malone hurried past him.

" Scandalous, your oiling off like that, Roretton," he said. He was pouting slightly, but he did not speak unkindly. Tony rather liked him for the remark. " Very Irish," he thought him, with his fair hair and complexion and startlingly light blue eyes.

It was by now nearly a quarter past eleven. Most of the people in the House seemed to be drifting out of doors. Tony found Mathews waiting by the gate of the House garden.

" Where's everyone going ? " he asked.

" The Head's call-over."

" Oh, of course," said Tony. He added, " Shall we go ? "

" All right."

The whole school seemed to have assembled outside the concert hall. Tony was dismayed. Just as he was growing accustomed to the fellows in Jennings's he was flung out among a crowd of people, many of whom looked more impressive even than the bloods in the House. Little knots of boys stood all around him. What were they to him ? What was he to them ?

Gradually the school moved into the concert hall. Tony and Mathews wormed their way to the back. Nobody seemed to notice them ; but all around them they heard

greetings exchanged in whispers. They turned towards the platform where the masters had already seated themselves. A forbidding company they seemed to Tony in their black gowns, and with their solemn greyish faces. With surprise, Tony noticed that one of them was actually smiling – an impish, roguish smile. Tony wondered who this man could be that was indulging in such indecent mirth.

From a door on the side of the platform another master walked slowly in. Suddenly, uproariously, the School cheered. It was Tony's first sight of the Headmaster. Immediately the immense size of the man's head struck him. A huge hooked nose, thin lips, and somewhat yellow complexion reminded him of a vulture.

The Headmaster held up his hand ; and the cheering dwindled and ceased. He took off his mortar-board, revealing a forehead which was wide rather than high.

"I hope," he said, "that you have all had splendid holidays."

His manner of speech was measured and deliberate. Tony stared at him reverently as he proceeded to read over the names of the boys who had been placed in new forms.

A square head set on a square body which stood very rigidly in the centre of the platform. A rocklike man, scarcely over middle age. White, thought Tony, was his key-colour, just as Malone's was blue and Jennings's grey.

At last the list of names came to an end. "I want," the Head was saying, "to see all new boys this evening at six o'clock in the Third Form room. When you are dismissed from here you will go to your new form-rooms for a few minutes. You may go."

Tony had been placed in the Fifth. The Fifth, so Curtis had informed him, was taken by Mr. Brooke.

"What's he like?" Tony had asked.

"Oh, he's one of these 'Yees, my friend,' men," was all Curtis had said.

In actual fact, Mr. Brooke proved to be a rotund little man with a round, kindly face. Tony noticed that he greeted all the old members of his form with an exaggerated courtesy that was obviously intended to be 'old-world.'

"Yees," he said with a chuckle, "it's very *gratifying* to see so many old friends back again. Ye-es." Whereat the form very properly laughed. And Tony, who found this his first opportunity for a laugh, was rewarded with a particularly florid beam from over the iron spectacles.

"Yees," Mr. Brooke continued, "I want to get through two books of Thucydides this term, and also the *Frogs*. Er – how many of you fellows have done the *Frogs*? Ye-es. Only you, Cunningham? Ye-es. You've rather taken *root* here, haven't you? Good soil for you, eh? Ye-es."

And the form went out of the room in a very amenable frame of mind.

After lunch the day passed more quickly, and at six o'clock Tony had succeeded in avoiding doing the wrong thing to any noticeable extent. At five to six he and Mathews made their way to the Third Form room. Disconsolately he looked round upon the other hundred new boys. During the day a curious loneliness had settled upon him. He gazed at the rows of faces. He was looking for something – he didn't quite know what – something of which he felt an increasing lack. Perhaps it was due to an unformulated hope of finding some facial resemblance to Phil. But all that caught his eye was the spectacle of a small, precocious-looking boy who was standing upon a desk shouting ecstatically.

"That," said Mathews, "is Merrivale. I see him

sometimes in the holidays. He has been brought up with sisters," he added.

Tony was nodding his disapproval when the Headmaster walked into the room.

Instinctively everyone stood up.

Once more Tony was struck by the curve of the Head's huge nose and by the square dignity of the way he carried himself. It was a pity, thought Tony, that he was not taller, and a little older. Still, he made up for his lack of height by the carriage of his head. His head was always tilted upwards to the right, and was set off by the mortar-board which he wore forward over his brow and inclined towards his right eye.

He stared firmly round the form-room. At last : " Sit down," he said.

" There are three things," he went on, settling himself squarely on his chair, " that I want to say to you.

" Firstly. . . . You must not come here thinking how much you are going to get out of the school. You must come to give. And remember, only your best is acceptable. Many of you will have been monitors and captains at your last schools. You must not rest on your oars. On the other hand, you must not expect to get to the top at once.

" You have here a great and long-standing tradition of which to learn. A tradition of character, of work, and of games forged and set by many generations of boys. It is for you to live up to, and beyond it. On your own shoulders you must carry it to more distant heights. Easy is the descent to Avernus ; but the path to Parnassus is long and steep.

" Secondly. . . . Remember your father and mother. Bring your home customs into your school life. Never give up your private prayers or your home manner of speech. Remember that here each one of you is the ambassador of his home. That his parents will be judged

by what he shows himself to be. No one of you from this day on can afford to live for himself. Your every action, your every gesture, will and must reflect upon your families and upon your school.

" You have taken upon yourselves a large and a splendid responsibility.

" Thirdly . . . and, as I think, most important of all . . . your friends."

For an instant Tony caught the Headmaster's eyes. A premonition of what the Headmaster was about to say came to him.

" You will make here," the Head was continuing, " a great multitude of friends. See that all your acquaintanceships are open and honest. Shun sentiment as you would shun theft. Let all your friendships be as a boy to a boy."

Again the Head paused. Again Tony felt that the Head had been looking particularly at him.

At last : " That is all I want to say to you," he said. " You may go."

Tony felt puzzled as he walked along towards Jennings's. He was pleased with the idea of a tradition to live for. He was struck by the immense repressed power of the Headmaster. And yet . . . what was that he had said about his friendships being as a boy to a boy? Was it not a little reminiscent of Mr. Stethens's jaw? What had the Head meant? Would he have disapproved of Phil? A friendship such as his with Phil could not have been *wrong*. Were such friendships common? Surely they could not be? He did not know. It was all rather obscure.

Tony was glad to get into bed that night. There he was certain that he could not do the wrong thing. There he could not be made to fag. There at least he could escape from all these bewildering people.

The school clock struck ; school bells rang ; one day

became very like another. Tony found a small measure of assurance. Each morning after breakfast he and Malone went to tidy out Captain's study. The bloods and prefects were infinitely less awe-inspiring when seen from close to. Cameron, the Captain of the House, a big red-haired Scotchman, appeared curiously tame and dreamy when behind the doors of his own study. The time after breakfast was used by most of the House for doing work. Of all the prefects Cameron seemed to Tony to be the only one who did his own work. Pattinson, the Captain of Rugger, was always in need of someone to finish off his Latin exercise. On rugger days the monitors formed themselves into a joint stock company for the finishing of Pattinson's Latin. On other days he had usually to shift for himself.

"What's the Latin for bishop, Christy?"

"Don't know. What does *témoignage* mean?"

"John, bishop in Latin?" Cameron would grunt.
"Look in the dictionary."

"Oh! hell! I'm absolutely up it for this sentence. Roretton, Latin for bishop, for the love of Mike."

Tony, who was busy dusting the mantelpiece, turned round quickly.

He said: "Pontifex, I think, Pattinson."

"Good man! D'you hear that, John? You didn't know that!" And Tony felt distinctly pleased with himself.

On the whole he found his work easy. Mr. Brooke regarded him favourably and saved his occasional sarcasms for other members of the form.

"Ye-es, Cunningham," he would say, "have you *time* to look out of the window?"

"No, sir."

"No. No. Then you're a very extravagant fellow, Cunningham."

Or, on another occasion, when Mr. Brooke walked in five minutes late for early school and found Russell and Cunningham fighting over a corner desk:

"Ye-es, you two fellows, have you *time* to rag?"

Cunningham: "No, sir."

Russell, insolently: "Under the circumstances, yes, sir."

Mr. Brooke glared at them through his iron spectacles.

"So *you* haven't time to rag, Cunningham? Ye-es. Then will you do me a hundred lines for extravagance. And so you *have* time to rag, have you, Russell? Very well. Under the circumstances, very well."

And Mr. Brooke took his seat at his desk. "Let me see now, where'd we got to? Ye-es" — this with a beaming smile. "Russell, will you come up and render this passage — er — under the circumstances?"

For three lines Russell translated correctly. Then he came to a word he didn't know.

Mr. Brooke took off his spectacles and beamed round the form. Then, placing his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, he turned to Russell:

"Ye-es, Russell, you hadn't, I suppose, *time* to look up this word?"

"No, sir."

"No. No. Of course not. But you had time to rag, had you not? Yes. Yes."

"No, sir."

"No? No, Russell? No indeed? Then you lied to me, Russell. Under the circumstances you will do me two hundred lines for falsehood, Russell. And — er — let me see. Ye-es, two hundred lines under the circumstances for failing to know the construe."

And Mr. Brooke smiled round gratuitously upon his form.

No other new boy in Jennings was as high up in school

as the Fifth ; and Tony was regarded by Paddon and Jenkins and Mathews as being suspiciously clever. Tony did not very much care. Paddon spent most of his time running, for no apparent reason, about the school grounds ; and Jenkins's chief concern was to insinuate as many "dams" and "hells" as possible into his conversation.

All three of them accused Tony of "hoityness," though Mathews occasionally condescended to walk about with him.

3

Tony preferred generally to walk about by himself. On many afternoons during his first few weeks he would stroll alone down the Avenue and along the Walk while the House was playing League rugger. Those September evenings were very pleasant. The skies had not yet begun to cloud over, and were of that light blue colour which becomes fainter and fainter as it nears the horizon. All round the edge of the earth the sky was white with a fluffy mist. There was a sharpness in the air - the remains perhaps of a night frost. The grass was soft and springy from the lavish autumn dew.

The beauty of the place entered gradually into Tony's being ; the infinitely reposeful greyness of the school buildings and the chapel ; the brilliant sweep of green grass on the Round ; the faded autumnal tints of the masters' garden ; the orange hues of the leaves : all these things made up a mosaic of exquisite, if lifeless, beauty.

The housemasters' houses lay roughly along two equal sides of a triangle, which had its apex in the main school buildings. The school buildings had been part of an old Gothic monastery. The greyness of the stone was mellowed now and soft, and the pointed windows were in many places overgrown with a reddish creeper.

In front of the school buildings, and separated from them by a broad pavement, lay the masters' garden, rather dim and subdued now after the riot of roses which must have coloured its beds in the summer term. Beyond that again the Round, or playing-fields, began. The Round was a tract of turf which filled in the body of the triangle and gradually widened out till it met its margin in a line of elms forming the base of the triangle and extending for more than half a mile. This row of elms was known as the Walk.

Tony liked best to walk down the Avenue (the road running along one side of the triangle, from the school buildings, past Jennings's house, to the far end of the Walk) and turn along the Walk, till he came to the gap in the trees. From this point he would stop and look over the gate to the left. At the bottom of a slope, and about a hundred yards away, lay a long, narrow mere. Very cold and dead it seemed in this thin autumn sunlight. The willows along its sides were barren, and all the rushes had died down. Tony turned round from the deserted scene.

On either side of him the sun gushed past ; it skimmed over the moist grass, grazed the white goal-posts, swarmed across the shrubs in the masters' garden, and played at last upon the reddish creeper on the grey walls of the school buildings. The sun seemed to have focused itself at the apex of the triangle. Here at the middle of the base stood he, lonely and quite unknown. On either side of him lay the Houses, ignoring his presence ; in front of him the kaleidoscope of scrums and forward movements came and went, all heedless of his existence ; in front of him again, and beyond the playing-field, the silent, unconscious laburnums of the Quad garden ; and beyond that, and crowning the entire grounds, the school buildings slept in the fading sun, unaware of him.

All these things ignored him. All these things, thought Tony — buildings, grass, trees, people — all these things should one day pay him recognition.

For the present — he must go back to tea.

About a fortnight after the beginning of term Tony noticed at lunch that the new boy Dickson was not in his usual place.

"Where's Dickson?" he asked Malone, who was sitting opposite him.

"In the san., I daresay. Matron says he's got quite a high temperature."

"Oh."

For three days Dickson remained indisposed. On the third day, as Tony was watching Leagues, a boy in a Hall straw came up to him.

"D'you know if that man John Dickson's got 'flu?" he asked.

"I think so," said Tony.

"Oh, thanks. My mater knows him at home, you see."

Tony walked on towards the House door. Curtis and another Jennings's junior passed him.

"Good Lord," Tony heard one of them say. "There's the man we saw speaking to that man in the Hall."

"That man?" came the very audible answer. "Well, he looks a wreck." Tony went quickly into the House.

That night the conversation in the bedroom turned to the new boy Dickson. Mysterious hints were dropped. Senior fags took pleasure in only half smothering sniggers. Two'ers did their best to create a detective-story atmosphere. Tony couldn't imagine why there should be all this secrecy about a new boy having 'flu.

"Well, anyhow," said Christy at last, "I don't suppose Jennings will have him back. The whole of his family seems to be a bit dotty."

It dawned on Tony at about eleven o'clock.

Dickson had run away from school! And it afforded him some satisfaction to think that, even though he *had* talked to a man in another House, he had five tedious years in which to live it down. But for Dickson the benefit of Mr. Jennings's roof, tutelage, and experience would not, a second time, be available.

For Dickson there would be no tedium; and no five years.

The term wore on, and Tony began to regret Meston House a good deal less. He so enjoyed being one of a huge crowd. The chapel services pleased him by the very volume of sound and the very richness of the colouring of choir and chancel. He submitted himself innocently for the O.T.C. On the evening that he was accepted as a recruit he remarked in an exultant whisper to Walker, the junior whose bed was next to his:

"I've joined the corps to-day!"

Unfortunately, the remark was delivered during a temporary silence, and was overheard by the entire bedroom. Christy greeted it with a lofty but genuinely amused smile. Meredith, a three-er at the far end of the bedroom, murmured, "Poor devil! You'll smart for it." The fags tittered to each other and smirked in Tony's direction.

Tony went very red.

"I'm sorry," he said vaguely.

"You needn't apologise," said Christy pleasantly.

The moment had been an embarrassing one for Tony; almost as embarrassing as that on the first Sunday of the term when he had discovered that he had no penny for the collection, and Mr. Brooke had stood over him, peering through his iron spectacles and muttering: "For the mission — for the School Mission."

Tony enjoyed the bedroom for the same reasons that he enjoyed meals: because they both provided sanctuary

from compulsory rugger and calls of "Boy." The conversation in the bedroom was often amusing, centring, as it usually did, between Christy and Meredith. Christy was the House Captain of Cricket. He was a quiet and unobtrusive person, who was yet very careful of his personal appearance. He preferred the summer term. Meredith, on the other hand, was loud and boisterous. If there was ever a rag in the House, it was in Meredith's study. At rugger he made a clumsy, if violent, forward. Had he taken it seriously, he might have got his XV. But he never took anything seriously ; least of all the confirmation classes which he attended every Friday evening with Jennings.

The last week-end of term drew near. It was to be a full three days. On Saturday the biggest inter-school match ; on Sunday, confirmation ; on Monday, the final of the House matches. Jennings's held the House Football Cup from the previous year. It had been won by a team of League players from a Hall side composed almost entirely of XV and XXX men. This year, they were again to meet the Hall in the final ; and of last year's side only Pattinson, Marshall, and Freeman remained.

On the Friday evening Meredith came very late into the bedroom.

"Why are you late ?" Christy demanded.

"Jenners kept me behind," said Meredith. "And what do you think the old devil said ?" he went on. "He shut all the doors and pulled down all the blinds, and then he put his hand on my shoulder and said, in a pathetic and despairing voice :

"I have been watching you at lunch for some days."

At this point Meredith, overcome by a sense of his own humour, collapsed, giggling feebly, on to his bed.

"Yes," said Christy, "get on with it."

"Well," Meredith continued, "then the poor old

fool's voice went all goosey, and he groaned at me pitifully :

"Do you think I could allow a person who has not disciplined himself enough to make himself eat plain, wholesome puddings - do you think I could allow such a person to be confirmed ?"

A roar of delight went up.

"Well," said Christy, "and what clever remark did you make ?"

"Oh, I just told the old blighter that I'd have two goes of rice to-morrow, and eat a whole flaming blanc-mange on Sunday. Whereat he snivelled a bit and let me out."

"You don't make a bad story out of it," said Christy.

Meredith shrugged his shoulders.

"I swear it's word for word true," he said.

Tony's heart seemed to beat very quietly at this appalling distortion of ideas. But, after all, it was only Meredith's version.

The conversation turned upon the next day's match.

"Gad," said Meredith, "if we win . . ."

"It'll be the first time for five years."

"Yes, we'll fairly beat the place up," he laughed.

4

The next morning ushered in a regular December day. Low grey clouds raced over the school grounds in packs. The wind seemed to be sown with spots of sleety rain. There was the suspicion of a fog when Tony walked down to early school, and the match ground looked brown and heavy.

But the rain had stopped by lunch-time, though the wind continued to sweep horizontally across the Round. It was the first inter-school match that Tony had watched. He was amazed at the excitement prevailing even among

people like Sykes, who purported to have 'got above games.' The boys' touchline was crowded when he and Mathews arrived there. Nowhere along the rope could they find a place. At last they discovered two other new boys from Jennings's over whose heads they could see. On the opposite touchline were massed the entire staff, with their wives and children. A few strange faces indicated the presence of opponents' supporters. The Head was walking hectically up and down, greeting old boys and receiving parents.

The opposing side came on to the field in a bunch. A burst of clapping rattled out along the touchline. The school side appeared on the far line in ones and twos. Tony recognised Pattinson among the first group. Freemantle, the School Captain, came forward to toss. The referee walked on carrying the ball. The school's kick. A whistle. Freemantle taking the kick. "School. Come *along*, school." Tony had never heard the like of that first gargantuan shout. "School! Oh! Well *played*, school!" From a few voices on the far side: "Come *on*, college. Come *on*." "School! School! School!"

The waves of cheering ebbed and swelled as the ball swung forward towards the opponents' goal or the college's forwards brought it back into the school half. "School. Come *on*, school." Twice the other side all but scored. Twice a rattle of appreciative clapping broke out. Then Freemantle got clear away on his own. Up the left wing he darted, the whole way within ten yards of the spectators. The wire rope on which the school supporters leant swung and creaked. "School! Oh, school! Come *on*! Oh . . ." The groan that came from the touchline was impossible to restrain. "Oh." "Oh . . ." A whistle. Freemantle had failed to pass; had tried to cut through. The back had brought him

down. A scrum. "Well tried, school!" There was no mistaking the disappointment in that concerted shout. "Well tried, school! Now then, come along."

The school forwards had heeled it out. The half had got it. Out to the threes. The centre three to Freemantle. "School! Come on. Come *on*!" Freemantle to Pattinson. Pattinson with a plunge was over the line.

"Oh, well *played*, school! Oh, well *played*! WELL played, school! Schoool!" The wire rope rocked and whinnied. The whole line of spectators was spinning round, yelling, screaming. Hats flung in the air. Arms waving. Umbrellas caught up in trees. "School! Let's have *another*, school."

Freemantle took the kick and failed to convert. A long blast on the whistle. Half time. The rain was coming on now. In the next half it would be driving horizontally into the faces of the other side. Already the light was failing. A weird yellow glow came in patches through the tattered clouds. In front of the goals the mud was badly churned.

A whistle. They were off again. The rain and wind were with the school now. The wind became shriller and the rain was changing to hail. The light became more and more yellow. Even the cheering dwindled from very hoarseness. Pattinson scored again. Tony saw his face as he passed him, smeared with mud and sweat and blood from a cut lip, and looking almost sinister in the weird copper light. He was bleeding hard from the knee, and his white rugger vest was transparent with rain.

The wind shrieked; the school shouted; and the rain battered. Freemantle dropped a lucky, unexpected goal. The end came.

"Well *played*, school! Oh, well *played*! WELL played, school!" The school leapt over the rope and tore across the ground. They seized Freemantle. Hoisted him, and

rushed him along to the pavilion. Bunches of boys ran madly about looking for someone else to carry in. Most of the XV ran for it to their Houses. The shouting increased anew. In the jaundiced light Tony saw Mrs. Brooke standing upon a bench holding her infant son above her head, while a tide of boys surged wildly round her feet. A stampede of fellows from Jennings were pursuing Pattinson. Half way to the House they caught him : swung him on to their shoulders : jerked him from one stack of arms to the other. Tony rushed to join them ; bumped into the Head ; ran on ; caught Pattinson by the arm ; took his football boot in the eye. Round and round they carried him, round the masters' garden at a trot, galloping down the Avenue to the pavilion.

Call-over ought to be in five minutes.

"School ! Well played, school ! No call-over." The shout was taken up by the stray mobs of boys who were still scurrying in black gusts over the Round.

"Well played, school ! School !" A mass of humanity had clotted together in front of the pavilion. The cheering became incoherent, inarticulate. The bell was ringing for call-over. Two minutes, and the clock would strike. One minute and Mr. Brooke was seen to walk slowly up and take his stand at the door of the school buildings.

"Brooke ! Brooke ! Hurrah ! School ! Hurrah !"

The school clock struck the half-past four. In the place where the whole school should have been assembled some half-dozen new boys were gathered together. Most of the school was standing outside the pavilion baying for Freemantle.

"School ! School ! Well played, school !" The hurrying groups on the Round took up the cry.

Someone noticed that Brooke was still standing by the

school buildings : that he was actually reading out the names of the Sixth Form !

"Hurrah ! Brooke. Brooke !"

And the surging mass of humanity began to drift meaningfully in the direction of the solitary master. For an instant Mr. Brooke faced the mob. Tony wondered whether he was going to strike an attitude with a :

"Ye-es, you fellows, have you *time* to make all this hubbub ?"

But Mr. Brooke evidently thought better of it, and, pocketing his school list, he retired into the school buildings, shutting the door behind him.

For a moment the school eddied round indecisively in the Quad. The appearance of the Head at this point would have dispersed them. The Head was giving tea to his visitors.

Suddenly there was a shout of "The guns." Instantly the school threw itself upon the two Crimea cannon which stood on pedestals at either end of the Quad. Half a minute's heaving was enough to shift the first gun from its slab ; and Tony saw it being tugged by a human team, led by Meredith, in the direction of the Avenue. Meanwhile the second gun had been pulled off its stand, and had suffered in the process a severe fracture of its wheel. It was abandoned as unfit for service. The people who had waited to drag it away moved off at a run towards the Avenue.

Just opposite Jennings's house they met Mr. Fenley, driving his car home. Mr. Fenley was incompetent, ridiculous, and popular. Mr. Fenley's car was a two-seater Jowett of astonishing antiquity. The mass of boys across the road caused him to pull up. Instantly a small agile boy jumped on to the running-board.

"Take us for a ride, sir," he screamed.

In the lamplight Tony recognised him as Merrivale of

the Hall. The cry caught on. "Take us for a ride. Take us for a ride, sir!"

Mr. Fenley, who had previously been trying to escape with a smile, now began to stamp nervously upon the accelerator. An excruciating gear-change called forth a roar of merriment. Reluctantly the car lurched forward and ploughed its way suddenly through a dozen astonished boys. Instantly several people joined Merrivale on the running-board. Tony clambered on to the dickey. A plump youth leapt astride the bonnet. People ran alongside hanging on to the hood and the wind-screen, The car went a few gallant yards, but age and stamina were telling. The strings which supported the number-plate and the starting-handle had both given way. At last, with a faint moan, the engine stopped, and with a piteous grind the left wing and running-board fell to the ground.

Instantly everybody climbed off and drifted away from the wreckage as from a corpse. The last words that Tony heard as he ran off to see what had happened to the cannon were those of the plump youth who had bestrid the bonnet :

"By Monday, sir! I promise you you shall have a new car by Monday!"

At the end of the Avenue he met the rest of the mob returning. The cannon had got out of hand on the slope down to the mere and had gone to ground in a rhododendron bush.

The school bell was ringing again. This time the school obeyed it, and went in to tea.

On the next day the confirmation class went to Jennings for a last talk before the service. In the interval

between breakfast and chapel word came round the studies that the whole school had got a hundred lines from Brooke for being unnecessarily absent from call-over. Furthermore, all those who had assisted in pulling the cannon about were to see the Headmaster in the evening.

On his way down to chapel Tony passed Meredith.

"Feeling strong?" he heard someone ask him.

"You bet," he heard Meredith say. "I've got my lucky charm with me."

"What's that?"

Meredith held up something that he was carrying in his hand.

"Portion of Fenley's car," he said.

Everyone had to be in chapel five minutes early this morning to allow the parents to get settled into their seats.

Tony gazed along the line of pews. Once more he felt that keen enjoyment of being one in a crowd. It was difficult to believe that this smart, orderly, self-consciously dignified gathering was composed of the same boys as those that had last night swarmed in uncontrollable hordes over the Round. Yesterday they had been wild and barbaric, reckless and mad. To-day they were staid and solemn, reverent and sure. Yesterday, restless and mobile. To-day, silent and still.

The choir appeared in the aisle and walked slowly and majestically to the chancel - an assembly of princes in their crimson robes. The Headmaster went to his place. The Bishop ascended the steps of the altar to his chair.

"We will sing hymn number one hundred and eight." Yesterday these same boys of the choir had been shouting themselves hoarse with shrieks of "School! School!" So too had Mr. Brooke, the first tenor in the choir.

To-day they stood in crimson by the altar and, with complete awareness, sang :

*"When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."*

That night Meredith came rather late into the bedroom.
"Well," said Christy, "and what did you think of it?"
Meredith hesitated.

"It was a good service, wasn't it?" he said queerly.
There was a pause. Tony looked at Meredith with sudden curiosity.

"By the way," Meredith exclaimed in his ordinary voice, "would everyone like to give me sixpence?"

"Why?" said Christy.

Meredith laughed.

"New car for Fenley," he said.

I V

THE REYNARDISTS

TONY was glad to go home. It was not that the term had been unpleasant; but merely that it had been devoid of positive happiness. He had been regretting Phil. That, he felt, had been the real trouble.

"Well, darling," said his mother, "and how have you enjoyed school?"

"Oh, mummy," he said rapturously, "it was marvellous."

Tony threw himself with all his heart into the Christmas hunting and dancing at Burnans. Of the two he preferred hunting. It involved fewer introductions; and Tony hated being introduced. Besides, for the time being he accepted the maxim which he had so often heard at the dinner-table:

"Dancing's all right as long as you hunt as well; but these young men who dance all afternoon and don't know a horse from a cow - quite, quite sanguinary."

On Boxing Day the hounds met at Burnans itself. And Tony enjoyed walking about in a stock and bowler hat; and it pleased him to hand round ale to the estate hands, and to catch the gamekeeper's beery whisper:

"Master Tony looks a little M.F.H. already."

And for once he went unshyly among the men in pink coats and ladies in top-hats, conscious that he was in his own house, and that his boots and crop were his passport.

The hounds began to move off.

The Master put in at the top of the Spring Coppice – a wood that curled round the south side of the garden. As Tony had prayed, a hound spoke at once. He hated waiting outside a covert ; his pony was always so restless in the morning. Hark ! The whole pack crashed into that familiar music, which, since his donkey days, had sent through Tony a certain barbaric thrill. A holloa echoed out across the tops of the pines. The horn twanged. They had gone away on the far side ! The mad rush for the gate started. The flying mud slapped his cheeks. The air reeked with the smell of saddle-leather. With difficulty Tony drew his pony back. At last, after the big horses had all thundered past him, he let her have her head. But in the next field there was no gate ; and well he knew of that big drop on the far side. By this time he was easily the last of the ‘field.’ In front he could see a big bay horse just going over ; then another, and another ; and again another.

Now they were all over. Tony rode up to the place at a trot. It *was* a big drop. He turned round and round again, and faced the hedge. He would try it. But it was only a half-hearted try. The half-heartedness of the rider seemed to run down the reins ; and the pony refused.

“ Damn you, Vixen,” said Tony unreasonably. He half turned and rode down along the hedge. He would try it lower down. Unless . . . But no, there was no gate, and the drop was just the same.

Annoyed, and feeling that he had not been over-brave, Tony rode back to the covert side. Thank heaven, at any rate, that the second horsemen had gone round by the road. What would his father say if he could see him now ? Or his mother ?

“ Tony, don’t tell *me* that pony won’t jump any fence in this country ! ”

Well, it was no use feeling a fool. They were a mile away by now, a good mile. . . .

Hark ! What was that ?

Quite suddenly he could hear hounds again. They were coming towards him. Instinctively, Tony got off his pony and led it alongside the covert railings. They must have been headed. He kept quite still, half eager, and more than half afraid.

There was a crackle of twigs in the wood behind him. Then – not ten yards to his left – the brownest fox that he had ever seen jumped the ditch, and streaked out over the dew-swamped pasture. Tony gazed at the splendid beast in admiration ; and then jumped to his feet as he realised his position. Hounds would be out in a minute almost on top of him. Probably Vixen would kick them ; and the Master would lose his temper and send him home. Quickly he led Vixen off down to the right. The horn rang out twice – lyrically, ecstatically. The mad music of hounds broke over and above him. A horse jumped almost on to Vixen’s quarters. And, in a flash, it was over.

There they went running all together across the green wetness, with the Master, on his grey, riding twenty yards to their left.

Tony jumped on to Vixen.

Fortune had kept this moment for him, and he snatched it triumphantly. Three full minutes it would take the field to come round the covert. And, with sheer joy at his heart, he sat well down in the saddle, and, two hundred yards behind, set out to follow the Master.

There was a biggish hedge at the end of the meadow. But nothing was too big now. He dug his knees and calves well in, and remembered to give Vixen her head. The pony took the fence in her stride. On the other side there was more grass. Tony touched her with his crop ;

and over it, as one creature, they sped together. Another ugly fence in front. Tony collected her slightly, and then – *Slash!* A bramble whipped across his forehead and jerked his hat off. He could feel it hanging against his back as he raced over the plough. The wind lashed his cheeks and eyes ; pace swam round his arms and chest ; speed tugged at his heart. He gave a great involuntary shout of joy. Not a hundred and fifty yards ahead raced the pack with a cry that might waken the dead. Turning slightly in his saddle, he saw the first pink coat far away along the covert side.

Now the pack were in the lane and across it. Tony made for the gate. *Hell!* They had checked just over the hedge. It was a job to pull Vixen up. He trotted her a bit down the lane. The first member of the field was already on to the plough. A car drew up some fifty yards down the lane.

His mother ! Tony swelled with pride. His mother was one of those who had “lost her nerve, you know ; but, Gad ! she went like a bird in the old days.” Of course, she would know that he must have cut in. Still, the moment was dizzy with pleasure.

A long yearning note from a single hound. And now from another. Now the whole pack had struck it again. Tony gave them forty yards ; and now, before he realised it, he was clear of the lane. He heard a horse not far behind him. He sat well down. There was a small fence in front of him ; beneath him ; behind him. Someone had drawn nearly level ; and the hounds had doubled their interval. It was heavy going, this plough. Vixen was a bit blown too. He tapped her in front of the saddle. She answered it well. The next was a post and rails – firm, too, by the look of it. He checked Vixen a little : gave her a bit more rein. She rose for it. . . . But a bit too soon, a bit too far back.

Crack !

Her near fore rapped the rail viciously. The wood was as firm as a rock. Down they came together, down and over and sideways. Vixen was soon up, with her saddle all crooked. But Tony did not stir.

Already a man in a pink coat had dismounted and taken him by the shoulder. He half rose. That was better. Now he was on his feet again.

“ How’s that ? ” said the man.

“ I’m quite all right,” Tony answered. “ Don’t wait for me, sir.”

Already the field was up at the fence. Some horses were actually over. Many had refused. The pink-coated gentleman got on to his horse again.

“ Thank you awfully, sir.” Tony called out.

“ Well done, my boy,” came the answer. “ Well done.”

And there was Mr. Roretton himself. Well over, too.

“ All right ? ” he shouted. “ Well done, Tony,” and off he went again. But when he had let them all past, and it came to mounting again, Tony found that he had lost a stirrup. “ *Hell ! oh, hell !* ” he muttered, tugging fiercely at the bridle ; for Vixen was trembling to be after them again. But the stirrup was not to be seen. After a maddening delay of five minutes he found it in a patch of long grass. There was some difficulty in clinching the slot. At last he succeeded in getting up again ; and mournfully he rode on to the brow of the rising ground in front. The best hunting country in the county unrolled itself before his eyes – a pattern of greens and browns. But nowhere, in the whole breadth of the land, were those specks of red to be seen. They had gone clean, sheer away from him !

There was nothing for it but to go home.

Home by one o’clock !

"Why, Mr. Tony," said Lewis, the butler, "has anything gone wrong, sir?"

"I lost a stirrup," said Tony. "I don't want lunch, Lewis. I'll eat my sandwiches."

By this time his headache was so oppressive that he decided to go and lie down on his bed; whence he was awakened, at four o'clock, by the sound of the car returning.

Tony fancied that his father might be angry about his not trying to catch up the hunt again. But, for the first time that Tony could remember, Mr. Roretton evinced a certain pride in the son whom he had apparently always considered too gentle to be a gentleman.

"Colonel Fellows told me all about it," he announced at once. "A very good show, Tony. And here's half a crown for that fall of yours."

And although, as a rule, Tony felt it absurd to be given money in reward for a piece of truly bad riding, he took the proffered coin this time with a smile of real pleasure.

V

'STRANGE MEETING'

I

"Mrs. Bond!" "Edgar!" "Miss Plumtree!" "Two cherry ciders and four doughnuts." "Mrs. Bond!" "Edgar! oh, *Edgar!*!" "Can I have a still lemonade, please?" "Yes. In a minute, Mr. Merrivale." "Oh, Mrs. Bond, two cherry ciders, *please*." "All right, Mister Mathews. All right. I can't serve you all at once, can I?" "Miss Plumtree!" "Yes, Mr. Roretton, what is it?" "Two Cydraxes and four éclairs. No, penny ones. Thank you."

Tony balanced the two bottles on his tray and carried them to the long sideboard, where Malone was talking to Merrivale. It was about five o'clock on the second evening of the Easter term. Thoughtfully Tony wiped away the fug from one of the windows of the shop and stared out over the Round. A damp January mist was rubbing its back against the window-pane. Figures muffled in scarves and overcoats passed quickly to and fro on the path outside. Occasionally Tony recognised a face as it glimmered under the light of the shop lamp. Inside the shop, boys were piled up two and three deep against the counter. "Mrs. Bond. Oh, *please*, Mrs. Bond." And Mrs. Bond would move imperiously about behind the counter, picking up a banana here and a whipped cream walnut there and placing them with dignity before some favoured person; and every now and then waving a flabby hand in a deprecatory manner at

someone whom she considered to be behaving too loudly.

The floor was littered with scraps of orange-peel and banana-skin and fragments of silver paper ; and from the tea-rooms inside came a luscious smell of scrambled eggs. And all the while the shop door banged to and fro as people passed incessantly in and out.

"And what did *you* do in the hols, Roretton ?" Merrivale suddenly asked.

"Oh, I ?" said Tony awkwardly. "Well, I don't know. I hunted a bit."

This piece of information was greeted by Merrivale with a roar of laughter, in which Malone obediently joined.

"Whatever's the matter ?" Tony was rather annoyed. "What did *you* do, Merrivale ?"

"I ? Oh, I went to some marvellous dances, and saw two red-hot flicks."

Tony drank off the bulk of his poisonous-looking yellow drink in one gulp. "I see," he said. "Er - shall we go back, Malone ?"

"Good night !" said Merrivale.

"Good night," Tony answered. The queer agile little boy in the Hall fascinated him ; but at the same time he always appeared to be laughing at him. And that Tony could not endure. Besides, it was always rather dangerous to talk to people in other Houses.

The term wore on ; and Tony was not called upon to assist the House in Under 16 Rugger. He had, in fact, little enough to do except to play his compulsory games of fives once a week. But one day toward the end of February the school woke up to find the Round submerged beneath four inches of snow. Immediately after second school the slope to the mere was covered with people on

toboggans steering a precarious course between clumps of rhododendrons, and pulling themselves up perilously near to the edge of the water of the mere. Tony shared a toboggan with Mathews and Malone. Various masters stood round at the top of the slope, wondering, most of them, whether the snow justified the unpacking of their skis. Tony watched Merrivale go up to Mr. Fenley, who had just driven up in his newly-acquired Morris, and evidently ask him to come down with him on the toboggan. But Mr. Fenley appeared to have learnt wisdom. At last, however, having obviously been 'dared' to do so by one Mr. Kitson, who stood at the top of the slope smiling round quixotically upon the world, Mr. Fenley took his seat behind Merrivale on the toboggan.

The toboggan started even sooner than Merrivale intended, with the result that Mr. Fenley never really found his equilibrium. Consequently a delighted group of boys obtained a close-up of Merrivale falling off the toboggan half way down, and of Mr. Fenley, whose legs had become irreparably embroiled in the steering-rope, accompanying the toboggan on its three yards' leap into the mere.

Two juniors at once set about the work of salvaging Fenley, who was subsequently carried dripping up the slope to his car. Sympathetic cries of "Frightfully bad luck, sir !" "Couldn't you brake her, sir ?" accompanied him as he committed another shocking gear-change and drove off to meet his wife.

The snow cleared off in a day or two ; but the frost came on. For three nights it froze hard. On the fourth day the Head gave a half-holiday for the purpose of skating. Tony was one of the first people to wobble out from the bank of the mere on to the ice. The mere fact of the frost overturned all the school values. XV Colourmen were to be seen sprawling on their faces in the most

undignified attitudes, while supposed 'wrecks,' like the bespectacled Sykes of Jennings's, sped over the ice with grace and speed and performed the most complicated 'turns.' The dignified, rigid figure of the Headmaster was to be observed gliding along sedately where the ice was thickest. Fascinated, Tony watched Merrivale skimming round the edges of the mere. Very graceful his long, swinging strides, very beautiful the rhythm of his head and arms. The cold air had brought a trace of colour into his cheeks. Involuntarily Tony followed him with his gaze. Once in passing their eyes met, and Merrivale gave him a lovely, spontaneous smile of sheer joy. The beauty of the boy was magnetic. Tony found himself following him. There he went, flashing up behind the backs of some master or school Colourman and away again before they had time to turn round. Subtle, elusive, ethereal in his white sweater, with his white scarf floating behind him.

So taken up was Tony with watching Merrivale that he failed to notice that he was skating straight into Mr. Kitson, or that Mr. Kitson made no effort to get out of his way — in fact, rather the contrary. Consequently his elbow landed pungently in Mr. Kitson's hip.

"Oh, I'm frightfully sorry, sir. I beg your pardon."

Kitson smiled curiously. "It's quite all right, Roretton," he said.

Tony looked up quickly in surprise. How did the man know his name?

"You were observing the beauties of nature, I think." Kitson smiled roguishly as he spoke.

Tony watched him glide sedately away. What had he meant? A curious man, that Kitson. The head of a gnome upon the body of a judge. His ears were pointed like a satyr's, and his mouth was curled upwards at the corners, like Puck's. It was curious, thought Tony, that

a man with an impish, ever-ready smile like that should walk in such a sober, pontifical way. Tony remembered him as the man he had seen smiling in the Head's first call-over. Tony noticed Merrivale skating up towards him, his head bent slightly forward and his body curved as by the Athenian sculptor's art. Merrivale came to rest in front of Tony. He was very out of breath now. His lips were half open; and the colour had suffused his marble skin. With youth and with the power of movement his cheeks were aglow. Over his forehead his hair hung wildly and infinitely light. But it was his eyes that held Tony. They were dilating, startled, eager, ardent, quivering. Grey eyes tinged with violet, and diamond-bright. Like Shelley's eyes, thought Tony. In them there was caught and crystallised all his youth, his beauty, and his elusive vitality. By them he was connected with the faint blue of the February sky, with the ice, with the air, with the powdered snow, and with the sun itself.

"Marvellous, isn't it?" Merrivale exclaimed suddenly to the world in general.

Tony knew that he was wonderfully and terribly happy. He turned to the direction in which Merrivale was pointing. The sun was setting, cold and orange. A riband of cloud along the sky's rim scattered the beams among the skaters.

Tony glanced again at Merrivale. It was as though another sun was rising in him. It was as though Merrivale was of another world. Yes. That was it. He was unearthly. He had no part nor lot in this world of deadness. He had some sinister stake in the sun.

The Easter term was to end with the traditional field day. Tony's first enthusiasm for the corps had dwindled; and he was not deceived by the pomposity of the 'Battalion Orders for Field Operations timed to begin at 14.48 hours.' Neither did the action prove unexpectedly

exciting. Jennings's platoon sat waiting under a hedge for two hours ; ran forward two miles ; and were promptly captured. A consolidation followed. The corps was addressed by Major Winnington ; ate its tea ; and prepared to march back to the station.

Tony enjoyed the march home. He was very tired ; but it was easy to march in step to the sound of 'John Brown's Body' or 'Tipperary.' Once more he was conscious of a keen delight in the merging of his individuality in a crowd. A nameless unit in a nameless section of a numbered platoon of an impersonal battalion. A reposeful interlude of non-existence between weeks of being Roretton, fag to Christy.

They were passing through a small colliery village. The spring had not reached it yet. Perhaps, thought Tony, spring would never reach it. In the file in front of him Meredith and Curtis — an incongruous pair that never conversed together anywhere except on parade — were discussing the futility of the corps.

"What's the hell's the use of a field day like that?"

"What bloody use is the corps at all?"

"None. But who takes it seriously?"

"Nobody but Sykes."

Tony wondered. He was looking at an old man who was leaning on the gate of his garden, watching the school march past. His face was heavily seamed ; and his eyes looked bleared and yellow. There was a great black smudge across his forehead, and his hands were grimy black. Evidently a collier. Probably a Socialist, thought Tony. For his lips seemed to curl in the way in which he had noticed certain workmen at home greet the appearance of his father's Daimler. Probably a pacifist Socialist disapproving of the warlike exterior of this procession.

"Well, it's quite amusing, sometimes," Curtis was saying.

"No bloody use. That's what I say."

Tony glanced sideways at the old collier. The man took his pipe out of his mouth, drew the back of his grimy hand across his lips and chin, and suddenly shouted, "God bless yer, boys."

Instantly the Meredith-Curtis conversation ceased. The platoon turned its head to have a look at this phenomenon. There was a pause. This was a novel way of greeting the King's uniform. At last : "Ruddy old sentimentalist," said Meredith.

As they turned the corner, Tony looked round.

The man was still leaning on the gate ; and his pipe was once more in his mouth.

2

During the last week of the term spring began to break through in earnest. For the first time, while he sat listening to Brooke giving Roman history notes. Tony heard coming from the Round the hum of the motor mower. As he walked out of the school buildings after second school, the smell of mown grass was wafted to him across the masters' garden. He drank it in greedily. It reminded him of Meston House ; and of Phil. In the masters' garden the first aubretia was in bloom ; a tiny patch of mauve among the brilliant green of the saxifrage leaves. It was spring. The finches were singing. It was resurrection. After lunch it began to rain — a gentle, warm rain from a drowsy spring sky. Tony walked out of the house alone, and strolled down the Avenue. The elms in the Avenue were still bare. They were always the last to begin to live. Tony turned down into the Walk. He took off his hat. The warm rain pashed against his forehead and trickled down his cheeks. In the tree-tops above him the young rooks were noisily restless. The daffodils in the moss

lay round the trunks of the trees, unmoving. At the gate down to the mere, he paused. He saw the buds of the rhododendrons swelling with crimson blossoms. He heard the cawing of the rooks and the cry of a bird that skimmed with curved wings to and fro across the surface of the mere. He saw the primroses wreathed in vivid patches round the edge of the mere. He felt the rain falling on his hair caressingly.

The sense of the beauty of the place hurt him. It was so detached – so impersonal. If only there was someone to come with the spring and give the place life, meaning, significance.

Thoughtfully he walked back to the House. During the past two terms he had almost forgotten Phil. Once, he remembered, he had thought that Phil had left in his life a gap of such a shape as never could adequately be filled. It had not been *filled* yet. But it looked as if the frayed ends were going to come together over the gap, as though the water would close over his head.

That evening after prep he sat alone in his study. Yes, the last two terms had been happy in a way. But they had been fragmentary. No continuity, no shape, no pattern ; just a string of incidents. Life looked very like a tangle now.

To find relief from his mood, Tony turned to the *Last Poems* of Housman, a book which he had taken out of the school library. Yes, they were decidedly a consolation. At last he came to the lines :

*Farewell, my man, for naught's eternal ;
No league of ours for sure.*

Three times he read them over. He laid the book down. Fear and amazement struck him. Here were his own thoughts clearly and definitely stated. Here all his fears

and all his suspicions were confirmed. Nothing, *nothing* lasts. And someone had discovered it before him. Was it not very strange ? Well, he had suspected it. Life was a tangle ; not a pattern. It had no continuity, no permanence. Hadn't it, though ? No, he did not believe that ; he would not believe that. His ideals should not be so easily smashed. Nevertheless, it was a relief to find that someone else had given expression to his mood and to his suspicion.

He read on :

*The skies, they are not always raining,
Nor grey, the twelve month through.
And I shall find good ways and mirth,
And range the lovely lands of earth
With friends no worse than you.*

It was a consolation ; and yet it was a disappointment. No, he decided, he didn't believe it.

3

When the summer term opened, Tony failed to live up to his reputation as a batsman, which had gone before him from Meston House. Eventually he just secured the last place in the Colts XI ; although Paddon and Mathews would have it that it was "scandalous Roretton getting his Colts on the strength of a mythical reputation," while Curtis definitely alleged that it was "Merrivale in the Hall who ought to have got them years before Roretton ; only (this very slyly) that man Denningham was afraid of giving them to him. *Afraid !*"

One thing Tony did owe to the summer term. And that was Sykes. Sykes wore glasses and did not play football. At the same time he was no intellectual snob. By

his contemporaries, as well as by Mr. Jennings, he had been marked down as a future Captain of the House.

Tony found that he could talk to Sykes on subjects far removed from the frivolous without acting and without shyness. For the last weeks of the summer term they would sit in Tony's study every evening during prep and watch the July sun setting over the Round.

And they would discuss people and Public Schools and Socrates, and the ethics of suicide and friendship. And though, in some quarters, the connection was a whispering topic, the few discerning people in the house realised that here was simply a suitable combination of two similar minds, and thought of Tony as 'rather a highbrow sort of man.'

This term, too, the Fifth went to Mr. Kitson for English — an arrangement which suited Tony, who had a real enthusiasm for English and an intense curiosity about Mr. Kitson himself. Kitson's method of teaching English was hardly orthodox ; for free-speech was nurtured in his weekly discussion class, and free-thinking was stimulated by the unusual subjects which he chose for essays.

"This next week," he announced at about half-term, "I want an essay on 'The Best Thing in Life.' And this time I particularly want your own, and not someone else's opinions."

It was a personal essay-subject, typical of Kitson, who scarcely troubled to disguise his natural inquisitiveness. Tony realised that here at last was a chance of giving legitimate vent to his opinions. He set down his complaint sincerely, concluding with the following words : 'Thus affection is, in my opinion, the thing which most makes life worth while ; and by affection I do not mean the expected, conventional, almost fashionable affection of the members of one family, but the spontaneous, natural, almost illogical affection of two previously strange people,

an affection to which some writers have given the inadequate name of friendship.'

A week later Mr. Kitson gave back the essays. "The vote of the majority," he said, "seems to go to a thing which people have, in their essays, called Happiness ; but many of them have, I think, confused happiness with pleasure. Next come Health and Religion, equal second. Three recommend Sportsmanship, whatever that may mean. Two have voted for Literature and Art. And, finally, there is one essay in favour of Friendship." This last statement was greeted with smirks and a snigger.

Mr. Kitson shrugged his shoulders.

"On the whole," he said, "these essays have been disappointing. There is a significant lack among them of high seriousness. In fact, only one of them penetrates below the surface at all. You must," he continued, "think *into* your subject, instead of merely about it . . ."

Kitson's voice ran on ; and Tony found himself wondering whether his essay had been the only one referred to. At the end of the hour Kitson called him up.

"A thoughtful essay of yours, Roretton," he said. "By the way, can you come to tea with me next Sunday ?"

"Er — yes, sir. Thank you very much."

"Good. Four o'clock then ?"

At four o'clock next Sunday, Tony knocked on the door of Mr. Kitson's room in the Master's House.

"Hullo, that you, Roretton ? Come on in."

Tony went over towards the window and settled himself in a chair.

"I hope I haven't made you miss your Sunday walk, have I ?"

"Oh, no, sir. As a matter of fact, I very seldom go for one."

Kitson glanced up quickly from pouring out tea.

"No, you don't, do you?" he said. "I see most of the people who do go for Sunday walks from this window." He waved his hand in the direction of the Avenue. "It's interesting," he added, with an odd, rapid smile.

"Yes. I suppose it is," said Tony. "But really I haven't anyone to go out with - regularly, I mean."

Kitson nodded sympathetically. "There isn't anyone really suited to you in that House, is there?" he said.

"Well - no."

"How about Malone?"

"Ye-es. I'm not sure that he'd come if I asked him."

"No; perhaps not. Curtis, of course, is too frivolous?"

"Well, he is rather, isn't he, sir?"

And they talked on over their tea, discussing the various juniors in Jennings's. Tony was amazed at Kitson's immense store of facts, and at the accuracy of his estimates of character.

"Another cup of tea?"

"Oh, thank you, sir."

Tony sat back in his chair and looked round the room. There were some prints of a Cambridge college on the walls, and also a water-colour or two. The mantelpiece was covered with photographs; chiefly snapshots of boys. There was an enlargement of one boy hurdling, and of another evidently winning the cross-country.

"That is a fine photograph, don't you think?" said Kitson, pointing to the snapshot of the hurdler. "He used to be a great friend." Kitson lit a cigarette. "By the way," he went on, "that essay of yours was interesting." He paused; but Tony said nothing.

"It seemed to me though," he continued, "that you didn't say quite what you really felt."

"How d'you mean, sir?"

"Well, I mean that you would have used a stronger word than friendship if you'd - had more confidence."

Tony murmured something which sounded like "Perhaps."

"You wrote from experience, I suppose?"

Kitson nodded.

"Then you really believe that - 'friendship' is the best thing in life?"

"Yes."

"And you live for it?"

"Well - not entirely."

"What d'you live for, then?"

"Well—" Tony hesitated. "I don't really know; at least . . . it's hard to explain. I live for a pattern, I think."

Kitson raised his eyebrows.

"A pattern? You don't mean an example, do you?"

"No. Lor', no." Tony was becoming confused.

"But won't you explain?" Kitson asked quietly.

"Well, it'll sound silly, still . . . Oh, well . . . I said I lived for a pattern. I meant that I want to find symmetry. I want someone who will feel for me exactly as I feel for him. I want to have my attitude reciprocated. I want our life-lines - his and mine - to be two lines almost parallel, but gradually getting sort of closer and closer, until they get lost in the sunset. I want a dual existence leading through four years of school up to a climax. That's the shape that I believe my life should take. But so far here it's been a pretty fair tangle," he added with a laugh.

Kitson nodded. Tony felt that he really did understand; and he did not in the least regret his own sudden confession of faith.

"Then you think life's a pattern?" Kitson asked him.

"It doesn't look like it just at the minute," said Tony, "but I know that it must be, really."

"And the best thing in life is - love?"

Tony nodded.

"Silly, isn't it?" he said.

"Well," said Kitson slowly, "there's no love without stimulus you know. Still - life's a pattern. And in four years' time you must come and tell me whether both these things aren't so. Will you?"

"I should like to," said Tony.

4

Tony came back for his second Christmas term sceptical, and a little soured. The usual and so-called healthy desire of a boy to go back to school is not rooted in a love of the school buildings or in a profound attachment to the Latin Primer.

It is because there is someone in the world who loves us that we wish to be alive to-morrow. It is because the average schoolboy has someone at school whom he likes, or who is fond of him, that he is eager to go back and start a new term. But for Tony there was nobody of this description. For Tony there was but a mild wish to return.

Only too well he realised that he was avoided in Jennings's by the people of his own age or position. "So frightfully hoity," they thought him. And he knew that if he was to discover the real friend, whose image his subconscious mind was never tired of forming, he must ignore the convention of House Exclusiveness.

Of course, there was Sykes. But Sykes was adequate only to his intellect. Besides, he was three years older, and, by this time, a House prefect. Still, it was to Sykes that, on an evening late in December, Tony unburdened himself of his feelings on this matter of House Exclusiveness. It had been dark for an hour, and 'lockers' in

studies were to last for another half hour yet. The Round looked curiously deserted and friendless. There was a solitary light in the chapel. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday, which, at this time of year, meant that from 5.25 one evening till 8 o'clock the next morning he was shut up with the motley fifty whom the unexacting Mr. Jennings had elected to gather under his gown. Oh, why hadn't he gone to the Hall? The Headmaster was at least a fine first-sight judge of men. He did know how to pick his material.

"Why are we always being so securely railed off from other Houses?" said Tony suddenly. "D'you know, Sykes?"

"My good man," said the other, "why anything? Why are we locked up at five o'clock? Why are we scarcely allowed off one grass plot in the daytime? Why aren't we allowed bicycles? Because we aren't considered fit to be trusted. Because a former Headmaster was afraid of two kindred evil spirits going off and being Bad Men together - going on drinking and smoking parties and the rest of it. Because he was afraid of a manifest increase in these 'so terribly bad friendships' of which the average mother is in such a funk."

"Of course, it didn't occur to him," rejoined Tony, "that in the dim future someone might want to make a genuine friend, as opposed to a partner in crime, out of another House?"

"I shouldn't think it occurred to *him*; though it may have occurred to one or two younger masters on arrival. But they soon forget it. The spirit conforms to the groove, as the body swells or shrinks into the cap and gown. Besides, at a Public School they have to be, above all, cautious. At all costs, whatever the price, dear little Johnny and poor little Dick must be safe. Good heavens! Some housemasters would as soon give permission to a man of

another House to come into their House as they would to a French count or to a musical comedy actress."

Tony sighed. "They are apparently quite unable to distinguish between two things that are entirely different," he said. "Supposing, now, that I wanted to make friends with Rogerson in the School House, how long should I have to wait before the bloods granted me a licence, so to speak?"

"They might countenance your talking to aliens after three years, walking with them after four."

"The bloods are kind."

"On the other hand," Sykes went on, "they are always willing to adopt the attitude: 'Certainly. Go. Go wherever you like. Go and make your friends in other Houses. We invite you to do so. But, of course, of course you won't be considered as anything else than an outcast in Jennings's. You will have expected that. But go. Go, do. By all means, go.'"

"I understand," said Tony. "It's a blood's privilege to make friends."

"One day you will be a blood yourself," Sykes reminded him.

"Perhaps I shall," said Tony, "and perhaps then," he added with a smile, "I shall remember - all this."

5

Tony went home to Burnans to find the household in a state of guilty satisfaction. Tony's bachelor uncle, Sir Anthony Roretton, had just died, and Tony's father had inherited the baronetcy.

VI

'L'AMOUR QUI N'OSE PAS DIRE SON NOM'

I

TONY found the Easter term more enjoyable from the first. It almost seemed as though there was greater electricity in the air itself. Towards the beginning of March he cut himself finally adrift from all his earthly companions; and he would walk everywhere alone, happy because of the chatty existence of the rooks, and the green, astonished trees. And he would stand alone in the evening, near the Quad or on the Round, breathing the sudden, elusive smells of mown grass; or walking down the avenue towards the mere, as the last February sun spilt its diluted gold across the water on to the trunks of the elms beyond. And in these days of early March Tony found within his own poetic self his most sufficing friend. No conversation was so satisfying as his own untrammelled thoughts; no spoken emotions were as exciting as the aimless and ineffable longings of his own separate heart. He had caught something of the *αὐτάρκεια* of the Greeks. He had all but found the secret of the Athenian happiness. So the people in Jennings's began to think him 'a bit mad.' As soon as 'lockers' came, and Mr. Jennings barricaded up his House, Tony would go out to a spare-time class, and read *The Apology* of Socrates, and discuss the right of anyone to claim a direct message from God, with Mr. Laing; who, Tony discovered, concealed, beneath the decent blackness of his gown, a broad and effervescent mind. Or he would sit in his study, with his

window open to the shy stars and blue, retiring mists, and devour large pieces of Rupert Brooke :

*But Winter's broken and earth's awoken,
And the small birds cry again.
And the hawthorn hedge puts forth its buds,
And my heart puts forth its pain.*

And sometimes he would begin writing a sonnet himself ; for herein lay his most potent comfort — in that occasional ability to express his need, to give utterance to his abysmal emptiness of heart.

And it was when Tony was thus absorbed in himself that the twenty-second of March broke upon him with the incidents that he was never to forget.

2

It was a wonderful evening, enriched with all the glory of premature loveliness. A few hours of May had found their way into the middle of boorish March. In a single bar of gold the sun streamed down the lane which ran past the fives courts, where Tony was playing his compulsory game with Mathews and Curtis and Freemantle. It was a dull game within ; and a faery evening outside ; too good to be wasted sweating under a glass roof. Still, they had finished the first game ; and Tony ran his eye tediously along the line of spectators.

Then it happened.

Tony's eye, in passing, rested for a second on the face of a boy who was watching the people in the next court play — a boy whom he remembered vaguely as having played football against him ; rested for a second, for half a minute, for a minute — a minute during which it was a physical impossibility to take his eyes away. It was as

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though some part of the other's atmosphere had leapt out in an invisible tongue and claimed him for its own. It was as though he had been hypnotised. All he knew was that he was staring, staring, staring at a remarkable face. Gradually, he was aware that somehow it was not with his eyes alone that he was staring ; it was as though his whole body, his whole self, was staring, peering, gazing, in wonder, in admiration, almost in adoration — his whole self, petrified, spellbound, magnetised.

Somewhere he heard someone say : " Roretton."

A fives ball hit him on the shoulder.

" Are you going on ? " they were asking. He turned round.

" No," he said. " I mean, yes."

" Good God, man, you're looking all moonstruck," said Curtis helpfully.

Tony turned for a last look at the miracle. Queerly he felt that he was no longer looking at all through his eyes at the other's face, but that he was looking through — what ? — his mind perhaps, at the other's self. It was as though an invisible stream of attraction, as firm as iron, but more elastic, held his self to this other self. And even when he turned his eyes away, he found that the contact was strangely unbroken, and that with the eyes of the mind he could still realise the things of the other's self, as clearly as if he were looking at him.

As Tony turned to go up on the top step, it came to him, that name he was catching at — Sladen ! That was it, Sladen in the Hall. Sladen who came in the autumn with the cricket reputation. Tony missed a simple slam completely, and came down. Shyly he glanced out of the court. Again he was terrifyingly aware of that self within the physical self. " Look at me, look at me," he heard himself shout ; but he knew that his lips had made no sound. " Look at me, look at me," he heard the vagrant

echoes inside him. He glanced round. Sladen was walking past his court.

"Stop! Stop and look at me," he was screaming now. Surely *that* must have been out loud. But no, everyone was going on playing. He stole another glance.

Sladen had stopped. For a second Sladen was looking most certainly at him. Significant! Significant! Convulsively, triumphantly, that stranger self shouted and leapt. Sladen knew! He knew! Of course he knew! Perhaps he cared. Perhaps he cared. Perhaps he cared.

The ball came down the side wall. He hit it, hard, high, and with intention. It came back. Would it go towards Sladen? Would he pick it up? Tony turned and stared deliberately — this time with the eyes of flesh. The ball went straight for Sladen's feet. It hopped over his shoe. He made no effort to pick it up. Instead, he turned and walked away. Tony's heart fell, suddenly, abysmally, inexplicably. He was wracked with an incomprehensible despair. Why hadn't Sladen picked it up? Why? Oh, why?

"Do let's stop," he said aloud; "it's so hellishly hot."

"My good Roretton," said Curtis, "besides being mad, you're damned lazy."

But the game did not go on.

There was still half an hour before 'lockers.' Tony ran home before the others; and, as he ran, his heart beat lyric time.

"I've found him," he cried to himself, "I've found him, I've found him."

And the sun shone, and the birds seemed to sing, "Yes, you've found him," and the little wisps of March cloud winked and nodded, as Tony, after throwing on his clothes, ran out again, alone, on to the Quad.

There they were, Sladen and that other man, walking up the Avenue from the mere. Hell! they were just going

into the door of the Hall. Tony ran a few steps. Look! Sladen was turning. He was looking in this direction. It was at Tony. No, it was at the clock on the concert hall. Which *was* it?

"Oh, God, was it me?" Tony groaned.

All evening he pondered the question: "Was it me he was looking at?" Now he knew it was. But now he wasn't quite certain. "Still, I've found him, I've found him," he consoled himself at last.

Somehow he did not feel like telling Sykes about the miracle. No, he would find fuller sympathy in his Rupert Brooke and in his Humbert Wolfe:

*Thus it began. On a cool and whispering eve,
When there was quiet in my heart, she came;
And there was an end of quiet.*

And there was an end of quiet!
But oh! what precious doubt! What glad tumult!

3

As he lay in bed that night, Tony tried to analyse what was happening to him. It was not Sladen's looks alone that attracted him; of that he was certain. Besides, Sladen was not good-looking in the accepted sense of that word. Admittedly, one did not notice the fact. One did not notice that his lips were too full and that his nose was all but turned up at the end. But one could not fail to notice the living richness of his skin, and the warm, brimming look in his eyes. There was something in his complexion that suggested the glow of the brown earth, upturned for sowing. His eyes were dark and drowsy. Only when he smiled did they open fully to exude a rich flood of amusement. His whole face was lit by the tides of

magnetic warmth which welled up perpetually inside him. Even his voice possessed this quality of deep, flooding richness.

But if his features were not moulded with classical regularity, his body was such as an Athenian gymnast might have envied. His walk was strong, rhythmical, and distinctive. Tony came to be able to recognise it across the whole breadth of the Round. For a force which was to take precedence of everything had come upon Tony. From that evening in March nothing was the same again ; there was nothing that remained untouched or unchanged by this all-pervading power. Into all the petty, separate incidents of school life a new continuity was infused. Every moment of the day, every tree in the Avenue, and every lamp-post on the school grounds, took on a new significance. Football became fraught with new possibilities ; and chapel was to be the most indispensable quarter of an hour of the morning.

The next day Tony got up a little earlier, and walked very slowly down to the main building. Would he catch a glimpse of him going into early school ? No. Alas ! No. After early school, chapel. Where would Sladen be sitting ? Fairly far back. Supposing he failed to find him as he walked out . . . ? O God ! Tony went into chapel as near last as he dared, scanning the rows minutely as he walked up the aisle. Still no sign. Tony prayed fervently ; and actually sang the hymn.

The service was over. Already the Sixth were going out. How should he find him among all these three hundred ? How on earth could he find him ? By now the people in Tony's pew had risen, and were facing the aisle. He began to walk out. Involuntarily he chose the left side to scrutinise. He allowed his gaze to wander. As if by magic, but perhaps by that invisible current of the day before, the first face that his eyes lit upon was that

of Sladen himself. Sladen was sitting near the back of the chapel, and was evidently trying to engage his right-hand neighbour in conversation. Tony found heaven for a second ; and then went hurtling into hell as he saw that the neighbour in question was Parney in Jennings's. The lucky swine ! Tony was wracked by a fierce and sudden jealousy, which was suddenly snuffed out again. This, after all, was something beyond jealousy.

Parney was a hopelessly insignificant person who had come to Towers Hill a term after Tony. Still, immediately after breakfast Tony sought him out.

"Hullo, Parney," he remarked, as casually as he could. "You're not in the same form as that man Sladen, are you ? "

"Yes, I am," said Parney. "Why ? "

"Is he a good man ? " asked Tony.

"Don't know," replied Parney peevishly. "A bit tough, I should think." And then, as an afterthought. "Oh, I suppose he is rather a good man really," he added. "Why ? "

"I just wondered," said Tony, and walked out.

4

And every afternoon Tony would run out, directly after lunch, on to the grounds ; and go to that part of the shop from which he could watch the door of the Hall. And his heart would give a little jerk as Sladen would appear through the door, and begin walking up to the shop ; and Tony would watch him eagerly for the suspicion of a glance, while he bought and drank some gaseous yellow liquid.

Those were happy hours for Tony ; and they were made all the more precious because the school was breaking up on the first of April. Tony asked everyone in the

Hall whom he considered safe and likely if they knew where that man Sladen lived ; but he found it impossible to discover this without arousing curiosity. And so, for one ecstatic week, Tony gave himself up to feasting his eyes on the face and movements and imagined character of this boy who obsessed him as if by magic.

It was a new, incredible happiness ; and a happiness more electric than that produced by his love of Phil. To be allowed to gaze from afar, day after day, upon Sladen, to be able to contemplate his splendid features and his superb movements — this was to Tony an excitement more wildly thrilling than anything he had ever known, a pleasure that eclipsed football and cricket, a joy that surpassed music, a poetic agitation more moving than poetry, a passionate desire to surrender and serve, a desire in which jealousy and envy knew no place. That Sladen splendidly and wonderfully existed — that was the thing that mattered. What did it count that Tony did not know and could not possess that thing, when he could appreciate that perfect and unique existence ?

On one morning only, Tony fancied that he had caught Sladen's eye again, as he was coming out of chapel. And, after the first paroxysm of unreasoning joy was passed, Tony found that there was still comfort to be derived from the thought that it was just possible that that great current of attraction which had so crumpled him, might still, even if ever so slightly, touch the serenity of the other's unruffled mind. One spark of dubious hope will light a furnace of love.

The 31st of March came, and Tony made the shocking discovery that on the morrow life ceased for a month.

" I wonder why ? " he said to himself.

And obliquely he thought of the Headmaster ; and of sentiment. But, then, sentiment was a weak thing, wet and pliant and selfish, and imbued with a slow, feminine

pain ; while this — this was firm and dry and shining like a dagger ; and its pain was sharp and stabbing.

No, this was not sentiment.

In sad perplexity Tony shook his head.

" It must be love," he muttered.

VII

METROPOLIS

"You don't seem *quite* as glad as usual to be home, darling?" Lady Roretton queried.

"I suppose I'm not *quite*," said Tony, with more of truth than of tact. And then: "I'm sorry, I mean," he added, "but somehow I have enjoyed school ever so much more this term."

"I'm so glad, darling." His mother took his hand warmly and drew him down gently on to the sofa beside her. Tony sighed. How he yearned to tell her all about Sladen . . . and yet . . . and yet . . . would she be able to understand? Tony squeezed her hand. She was *so* warm, so comforting . . . if only he could make her understand. Sladen . . .

"Mummy . . ." he began hesitantly.

"Yes, my darling? What is it? Tell Mummy . . ."

But it was impossible; he could not get out the words. He was hopelessly dumb and twisted inside.

"Well, anyhow, darling," she said at last, "you'll enjoy staying with Aunt Helen."

Miss Helen Mallaly was Lady Roretton's younger unmarried sister. At Burnans she had the reputation of being an intellectual. For living, as she did, in London, and so near to the pulse of things, she could not help catching a certain reality, a certain power of seeing things as they are, and accepting them. Tony had been looking forward to staying with his aunt. But the journey to

London was fraught with anxieties. All the way up from Burnans he wondered how much larger a tip than the provincial porter the London one would expect. The porter at Paddington was eventually paid off with 1s. 6d., which, to Tony's relief, seemed to satisfy him. The matter of the taxi's fare was the next formidable item. Tony noticed with reverence the way in which his cabby drove deftly through the Park Gates and insinuated himself into the stream of cars. All Londoners were highbrows; his father had said so. The taxi pulled up before a block of flats; he leant forward: 3s. 6d. by the meter. There was some difficulty in changing a pound note. "Will you give me fifteen bob out of it?" he said at last.

"Thank you, thank you, sir," said the cabby, in a tone of surprise which made Tony a little embarrassed. This London . . . how big it was, how grey, how universally intelligent. But as Tony passed through the door of his aunt's flat he was instantly at home. There was none of that affectation, that clumsy application of accumulated charm, that made a welcome to Burnans so embarrassing.

"Hullo, Tony," said his aunt warmly. "Glad you did the journey all right. You can do with some tea now, I expect?"

Tony smiled delightedly. "Well, yes, thank you, I think I can," he said. And together they walked into his aunt's sitting-room. What a restful room, was Tony's first thought — perhaps even a little too grey. His wandering gaze was arrested by a picture of a tree and a woman and child, hanging over the mantelpiece, all rather grey and restful.

"Do tell me, Auntie," he said. "Who did that?"

"That, Tony?" she said. "That's by Corot. I'm so glad you've noticed it. After tea you must look at all my

pictures, and have a glance at my books. Oh, yes ! and to-night you're going to take me to a play."

"Good heavens !" thought Tony ; but what he actually said was, "What fun, Auntie."

Tony enjoyed putting on his dinner-jacket that evening in his tiny bedroom — although he was rather afraid that he might get stuck with his tie. As it happened, it did come out more or less all right in the end, except that he found that he had not put it through the tape at the back. Still, it couldn't be undone again.

Tony enjoyed dinner. It was such a relief to talk to a person who loved poetry and was unafraid of admitting it. It was so good to hear poetry not pronounced 'poitry.' This time Tony even enjoyed going in the taxi. Piccadilly looked so grotesque, so empyreal, at night ; and Piccadilly Circus brought a cry of delight to Tony's lips. The pirouettes of rainbow lights, the jostling, eager people, the smooth inevitable taxis — how real they were, how stimulating. And how comforting it was to be handed the proper fare to give to the taxi man, and to nod as he touched his cap. And how amusing to stare round from the fourth row of the stalls and criticise well-dressed men and admire beautiful women. How enchanting to see a play which seemed less of a play than a reality. Tony sat wrapt in an enjoyment which he nourished with the utmost care. If he was held by the play, he was determined to be elated by the intervals.

"Well, Tony dear," said his aunt as they climbed again into a taxi, "how did you enjoy it ?"

"Oh, frightfully," said Tony. "I do wish I could have gone on the stage."

"Why 'could have,' Tony, and why can't you still if you want to ?"

"But surely, Auntie," he answered, "the stage is bad, isn't it ?"

"How do you mean : 'bad' ?"

"Well, I don't know — not 'right.' "

"You poor stupid !" laughed his aunt. "There's a lot of good in the stage. More than people think. More, perhaps, than your father thinks."

"Really ?" said Tony. His attention had strayed. He was watching the glitter of the people coming out of the stalls doors, and the passing unsightly crowd of men with tired eyes and women with painted lips. Across Piccadilly Circus they whirled again. Now they were in the Mall. And, peering through the window, Tony could make out the black forms strewn thick upon the lean benches.

"I wonder," he thought suddenly, "if Sladen lives in London." And with this pleasing uncertainty Tony's first night in the Metropolis drew to a close.

After breakfast the next morning Tony inspected his aunt's sitting-room in detail. The bookshelf attracted him first. Wilde was there in the cheap edition — all Wilde, he thought, with two copies of *Dorian Gray* ; and Rabelais, with Heath Robinson's whimsical illustrations ; and Renan ; and a businesslike row of paper-covered André Gide ; and *Isis Unveiled* : and one or two editions of André Maurois.

"Caviare to the general," thought Tony, and passed on to the pictures. What a relief to escape from the indifferent prints of unlovely gun-dogs ; the photographic likenesses of long-necked horses ; the single hound making its way home. ('Magnificent, Frank. You can just imagine it after any day's hunting.') How soothing was that Corot above the mantelpiece, and that other over the piano — 'Danse des Bergers' it was called ; it told of the true countryside, of good honest country folk, of a more spirited hazel and a willow untrammeled by any hound.

"It is good ; it breathes love." Tony could feel it.

His glance fell on a book that lay open on the table—*The History and Power of Mind*, by Richard Ingalese. The name attracted him; glancing over a page or two of a chapter on ‘Magnetism,’ his eye was caught by the following words :

‘There is one thing that matters ; and that is vibration ; . . . as man develops in thought, power, and capacity to draw into himself cosmic forces, his radiations expand until they may extend from six inches to several feet outwards. . . . If we meet with a person whose vibrations are much higher than our own, we will be likely either to worship that person or dislike him for being so far in advance of us. We will be greatly disturbed by the higher vibrations proceeding from him, which will very likely call forth all the good in us, or bring all the sediment in our nature to the surface.’

And instantly Tony remembered Sladen.

.

“I hope you don’t mind fish,” said his aunt at lunch. “I never eat meat myself, and I’m afraid I’ve forgotten to get any in. I suppose you like meat ?”

“Well, yes . . . I do,” said Tony, wondering what he ought to say.

“Carnivorous animal !” laughed his aunt. “Fancy liking eating those who in another hundred years or so will be your grandnephews and grandnieces.”

Tony looked shocked, and restrained himself from asking further questions. He changed the subject.

“Auntie, where’s the nearest Roman Catholic Church?” he asked.

“The Oratory, Tony,” she said. “Why, are you

thinking of turning Catholic ?” (Tony noticed that she pronounced it Cartholic.)

“Well, no,” he answered, “only I thought I’d like to go and look at it.”

Tony arrived at the steps of Brompton Oratory just as a procession of children in what appeared to him to be fancy dress was coming down them. A big crowd was looking on. He could not help wondering if they were all Catholics, or at least Christians, for he noticed that they all uncovered as the effigy of the Virgin passed them. He wondered whether his father would have done likewise ; probably he would have, he thought.

The procession passed. Tony hesitated for a moment, wondering whether he ought to go in. He saw a priest looking at him from the top step. Of course he could go in. A nun with a plate for offerings sat by the door. In his nervousness Tony dropped a half-crown piece on to it. Then he looked about him.

He was conscious of a slight disappointment ; the actual building was no more mystical than an Anglican cathedral. Perhaps the High Altar was more impressive ; it seemed to slope more significantly. There were about a dozen scattered people praying in the wooden seats. In the Chapel of the Virgin to the right he could just see the candles burning. A man came through the door and walked past him down the main aisle. As far as age was concerned, he might have been his father ; a smart military man, with the retired colonel’s moustache. To Tony’s surprise, he suddenly knelt down in the aisle. For half a minute he knelt there with head bowed. Then he rose and walked back through the door, dipping his hand, as he passed, into the Holy Water.

Tony was impressed. He tried to imagine his father kneeling in his pink coat in the aisle of the Burnans parish church. The idea was not pleasing.

He bought some pamphlets from the table at the door, including a booklet on *Vestments, Incense, and Confession*, and put twice their value in the box.

Then very thoughtfully he walked out.

A religion that could catch men . . .

They passed quickly, these days in April London. In the heat of the day there was Life, naked and throbbing, and strangely like a General Omnibus ; but before the dust rose and the din began, and again at last after the winds of tumult were laid, crept in the secret unruffled thoughts of Sladen, and of a golden evening by the fives courts of Towers Hill, when the birds sang together and the stars of the evening shouted for joy.

And all the time Tony was learning to appreciate London as an end in itself, and not as a means to an end ; to love the worried, staring, hustling people in the street, and the grave houses and the compensating strips of park, better than all the theatres and all the museums and restaurants.

"The still sad music of humanity...." He thought of a great ending to a sonnet :

*And when the winter nights grow lean and chilly,
God walks alone and weeps in Piccadilly.*

But unfortunately the remaining twelve lines would not come. Sometimes, when his aunt played one of Chopin's nocturnes to him, he would nearly achieve another couplet. But somehow never quite.

It was the last full day that Tony was to spend in London. Aunt Helen came in rather late to lunch.

"Tony," she said abruptly, "would you like to go to a cocktail party this evening ?"

"I should, Auntie," said Tony emphatically. "But aren't I rather young ?"

"Certainly not, dear," she answered. "One can't measure everyone's age in years. Besides, it's never too early to begin wanting to meet new people."

Still, Tony did feel a little hot about the hands when he and his aunt, arriving after six, were shown by a foreign-looking maid into the room designed, furnished, and inhabited by the two Miss Cunninghams. It was an unusual room ; full of unusual people. The walls were of a rough wood of an almost pink hue. There were no pictures or carpets. There was a fireplace ; there was also a piano. Tony came to himself. Miss Mallaly was trying to introduce him to their hostesses. For a few seconds afterwards Tony stood beside his aunt.

"Look at that woman with the black cigarette-holder," she whispered. Tony nodded, and looked. "That is a *very* celebrated actress," she said in an extremely low whisper. And Miss Mallaly's '*very's*' were so seldom employed that their significance could not be ignored. Then she drifted away, and Tony was left standing aimlessly in the middle of the room. Nobody seemed to find his presence there strange ; at the same time nobody seemed to consider it worthy of attention.

One of his hostesses came up to him.

"You're still at school, I suppose, Mr. Roretton ?"

Mr. Roretton ! and not quite sixteen. Tony felt that it was up to him to rise to it.

"Yes," he said, "I am still at school, as it happens - at a place called Towers Hill."

"Are you really ?" said Miss Cunningham, with agreeable ignorance. "Let me see, do you know Réni Maulois ? He fancies himself terribly on English education. Come and let me introduce you."

And, as Tony followed his hostess across the room, he noticed how his aunt seemed to have met everybody before,

and how it was only those whom she evidently knew less well that she sought out to converse with. Réni Maulois had evidently just finished talking to the *very* celebrated actress. He was smiling ; and the cocktail shaker in his hand was worked up and down ecstatically. He was hardly Tony's idea of a Frenchman — this slight man with his pale face, fair hair, and blue sensitive eyes.

Miss Cunningham took him by the arm.

" Réni, I want you to meet my friend Mr. Roretton," she said ; " he's an authority on education."

" Mr. Roretton — Comte Réni de Maulois."

Monsieur de Maulois took Tony's hand with a half-bow.

" Enchanté, monsieur," he said.

" Oh, but you must talk English, you know," laughed Miss Cunningham as she slid away.

" You're not drinking anything, Mr. Roretton ? A little of this Martini ? "

Tony was grateful for the commonplace opening. " Oh thank you so much," he said, not knowing in the least what a Martini might be. To his relief, it proved quite swallowable ; but, though he tried hard to like it, it seemed to him to be rather too medicinal in flavour.

" So you are still at school, Mr. Roretton," the other went on. " And I see you have met the Classics. If you will pardon me, you have the Greek manner ! "

" I only wish I had, monsieur," replied Tony with astonished pleasure ; with a boldness that surprised him he went on : " To be like Alcibiades, or Xenophon, or one of Socrates' friends — surely that would be more worth while than anything ? "

" Ah, so you know all those," replied the other. " And you have discovered braggart Hector and Oedipus and the peerless Antigone ? "

Tony nodded delightedly.

" Ah ! And you like them all. That is beautiful. And

you have met some of your own English poets, tinselled, delicate Swinburne, and white, ethereal Shelley, and poor, earnest, passionate, erring Byron ; yes, and Browning, though to me he seems to be difficult."

" Why yes, monsieur," said Tony, " I know them by heart — Byron perhaps not quite so well."

" And you have found Rupert Brooke in his Grantchester garden, and in his German railway carriage . . ." the comte continued, in his musical, girlish voice ; and the minutes ran on precipitate, beguiled by the Orphic richness of this Frenchman's English.

At last Tony felt a touch on his shoulder.

" I'm sorry to drag him away from you, Réni," he heard his aunt's voice saying.

" And I am sorry too," answered the Count. " Especially, my dear Helen, as I have only just learnt that he is your nephew. You must allow him to come and stay with me in Paris some time. Some time very soon, Mr. Roretton ? "

" I should love to," said Tony fervently.

The next day he travelled down to Burnans, armed with Catholic pamphlets and a French novel ; and eager to visit upon the stagnation of a county manor house his first-hand impressions of that Terrible Trio :

The cocktail ; the English actress ; and the foreign Count.

VIII

ENCHANTMENT

I

THREE days later Tony was sitting in the Towerston train. Never had he had more enjoyable holidays ; but never had he felt more excitement at going back to school. In addition, it was the summer term. To-day, or at latest to-morrow, he was to see Sladen again ; he was to take up life where he had left it off a month ago. He had been unable to sleep last night. Eventually, at about twelve o'clock, he had lit his candle and started to write a poem. It was quite a good poem, he had told himself this morning, though raw ; yes, decidedly raw :

*I left you fair and joyous,
With April in your eyes.
"I shall not change," you whispered,
Under the peeping skies,
With April in your eyes.*

*But now strange joys enthrall you.
(Oh ! haply you forget
Beyond the streams and mountains
One who remembers yet.)
Oh ! haply you forget.*

*To-morrow I shall find you
(May, May on you now).
Lovely as old, and heartless,
With May on cheek and brow ;
May, May on you now.*

Tony was quite pleased with his creation as he said it over to himself in the railway carriage. Caressingly he repeated it till the train drew in at the platform. Some of the most pleasurable moments of all Tony's life were to be spent in just leaving, or just arriving at, a place. This afternoon things were even better than usual. He took more than ordinary pleasure in wondering, as he stepped out of the train, whether he had really arrived on the right day ; and in laughing at himself as at least ten play-boxes on the platform reassured him.

Outside, in the station yard, he caught glimpses of people whom he had vaguely remembered having seen before. The old excitement and expectation had begun. Any one of these coyly tilted Homburgs might be concealing Sladen's brown, delightful eyes. No, he would not have a taxi ; he would walk down the hill from the town and up again to Towers Hill. And as he walked he scanned every casual passing taxi, wondering which of them, if any, was carrying the whole world for passenger.

Mr. Jennings greeted him with an essentially good-natured remark about cricket ; and, as soon as he was released from the drawing-room, Tony went to the other side of the house for his College Straw and slunk out on the Round. Surely there were very few people about, even for the first day. Still, there was much pleasure to be derived from anticipating. Spanish castles are the finest in the world. All the long May evening Tony paced the Avenue, scrutinising every taxi, and thinking of a thousand ways of greeting Sladen as if he had known him since he first came. But the House bell rang with the quest still unfulfilled ; and, a little testily, Tony went in to assist Mr. Jennings and his pupils in their eternal, if not immortal, rendering of

O God, our help in ages past.

That night Tony dreamt a lovely dream of ideal greeting and classic reunion ; and immediately after breakfast he was out again on the Quad. All the Hall fags were walking the Grounds. All except Sladen.

How unfair. What was he doing ? He couldn't still be unpacking. Twice Tony nearly questioned a Hall fag. But twice caution or shyness prevented him.

He would wait for the first call-over. Twelve o'clock struck. Ten past twelve turned ; and the Middle Fourth went up to have their names called over. This was The Moment. Every boy there raised his hat and walked away ; every boy was scrutinised by Tony as he went.

But Sladen was not there.

There was no doubt about it ; he just wasn't there. Late perhaps. . . . Tony turned sharply to his right. He came face to face with one Bevan in the Hall.

"Where's Sladen ?" he asked abruptly.

Beven's eyebrows flickered upwards. "Don't know," he said. "I mean, he's coming on Monday. Got 'flu. Why ?"

But Tony was gone.

"Coming on Monday."

Two intervening days of Hell. And in those two days Tony realised that it was not walls and roofs that made a school peculiar or lovable ; but men. The Houses might hold memories, the buildings might hold traditions. But the human inhabitants held the love. ἀνδρες γὰρ πόλις καὶ οὐ τείχη οἰδὲ νῆσες ἀνδρῶν κέναι. Tony had honestly believed that he had wanted to come back to Towers Hill. It was only now he realised that what he had wanted to come back to was Sladen.

Sunday dragged by ; and Tony wrote a letter, that must have surprised Lady Roretton, in which he repeated four times that he would much rather be at home. Monday broke in a fever of excitement. Tony almost hoped

that Sladen might have arrived before early school ; he felt that he had a genuine grievance when he found that he was not in chapel. The day wore on ; but Sladen never came. That swine Bevan. . . . Of course, Sladen would never come now ; never, never, never. It was finished. Tony was just preparing to go into deep mourning for the rest of the term, when, in the middle of Tuesday's second school, he heard a taxi drive up to the door of the Tower Hall.

He was standing up construing the *Birds* of Aristophanes at the time. If the next word had been in English he would not have known its meaning. "He's come, he's come, he's come," he cried ecstatically to himself.

"Come, Roretton," Mr. Renny was saying "ὁρνιθες, boy. You've had it on every page before, you know." Tony's mind whirled. Words clashed and ricochetted away. Taxi — ὁρνιθες — Sladen — ὁρνιθες — ὁρνιθες.

"Well, write it out, boy ; write it out in Greek and English ; write it out three hundred times ; ὁρνιθες — birds ; and now sit down." On another day Tony would have lapsed into sulks at what he invariably considered an unfair punishment. But to-day it was different. To-day, just as Mr. Renny was preparing to add, "And none of your pouting, Roretton," Tony actually smiled.

The clock struck, and Tony ran out of the buildings by the Tower Hall entrance. "Look at me ! Look at me !" The involuntary noiseless cry came to his lips. For there, on the Tower doorstep, stood Sladen.

He was just the same, somehow. Never, thought Tony, had he looked so compelling ; only his hair seemed longer than usual. Tony stood still, staring helplessly. Someone bumped into his back. Dazed, bewildered, but profoundly happy, he walked back to Jennings's. He tore up the stairs, threw his books on the table, and ran out again to the shop. He could just see the groundsman

tightening the guides of the nets. Tuesday ! Of course, there were Colts Nets this morning. Tony walked out towards them.

Gradually the nets filled. Now they were all full. No, there were only three people in the near one. Ah, here he was. How superb he looked in long flannels. For an hour Tony stood watching while his heart knelt in worship. But Sladen never even looked his way. It was so nearly perfect, that sleek leg-glide of his ; it only needed a little more quickness, a little more concentration.

And so it had begun again. And so, for six weeks, it continued. Every day the inevitable round of going into first school, coming out of chapel, going into second school, watching the nets before lunch and the game after, and walking the Round after tea. Every day Sladen seemed to be utterly unconscious of Tony's presence. Every day all that Tony did was altered by the very fact of Sladen's existence. Work was hopelessly neglected ; how could one concentrate in school when one was going to watch Sladen playing in a net after the third hour ? How could one prepare one's work in 'mousers,' when there was the thrilling alternative of reviewing every detail of the past day ?

Cricket was taken seriously. Tony must, if possible achieve his XXII colours. It might impress Sladen ; certainly it would make him aware of his existence. Religion came in gusts ; but always with the childish, unformulated conviction that if he was very good, he might be considered worthy of Sladen.

No place in all the world was as wonderful as Towers Hill in summer. And there was no time at Towers Hill so splendid as those painted, tiptoe, June evenings between tea and 'mousers' ; those minutes when the stumps had vanished from the Round, and the echoes of ball on bat were stilled, and even the greatest fifty was a memory ;

when the shadows lengthened, and the chapel windows caught the sun and glowed like tiger-moth's wings ; and it seemed that Colour and Tune and Rhyme had been let loose to run riot over the weary Grounds ; when the Cap and Gown were laid aside, and the Round yielded up its charm to the pairs of wandering figures that walked down over the grass to their assignation in the setting sun. For what is there better than to be treading on firm green turf, and breathing the great smells of June, and watching the sun go down upon the warm red sandstone of the Tower, and talking with a single friend ?

Black and sullen stood out the hills against the west, timidly garlanded with wisps of crimson cloud. Black and sullen they had stood while generations of Towers Hill boys had strolled over the Round, and walked away into the Sunset ; eternally black and sullen. Every evening the sun went down behind the same crest, in the same terrible way ; and yet not quite the same. Every evening it was a slightly different coloured last ray that singed the flag-staff on the Tower Hall. And every evening it was the same people that stayed out latest on the unyielding turf ; and yet not quite the same. Every evening it was a slightly altered group, that, in determination that there should be no waste, drank the summer sun to the lees.

Was it any wonder that, at the time when, in the eternal greyness of Towerston's streets and slums, those of the same age who had been carrying greasy baskets and pedalling green bicycles all day, were finding some measure of romance and affection at the side of the Vicar's scullery-maid or the Woolworth's assistant, was it any wonder that, at the same hour up there in the garden stillness of the Round, the same need should make itself felt ? For those aimless and forlorn-looking figures on the hilltop, that life of the valley was round the impassable corner. At the age when they would perhaps have fallen

into a most spiritual love with the first available scullery-maid, they were curtained off from all conversation with any female human being.

For the first six weeks of the summer term, Tony found himself walking about with Curtis, on whom the general, though not the particular, situation gradually dawned. Curtis was essentially a parasite, superficial and unsympathetic ; and it was a lucky day for Tony when he discovered Webb. Webb had been a year longer than Tony at Towers Hill. He was shrewd, broad-minded, and consistent. He had a considerable fondness for cricket ; and in the holidays he never missed one of Woolley's innings on a home ground. But the salient fact about Webb was that he was in the same form as Sladen ; furthermore, he even sat in the desk immediately behind Sladen. On discovering this, Tony besieged Webb incessantly, playing upon his love for cricket and showing considerable eagerness to demonstrate to him the square cut. When Webb discovered that he really could cut, he developed a genuine liking for the unusual Roretton. One day he even consented (though a year older) to walk about with him after tea.

Instantly Tony dropped Curtis. Webb found that Tony talked quite amusingly ; and that he was really keen on cricket ; and he quite enjoyed staying out till the last possible moment by the mere. As for Tony, he found Webb quite satisfactory ; and one Friday evening he made up his mind to trust him.

They were sitting by the side of the mere — a situation which involved some sacrifice on the part of Webb, since, after tea, the mere-side was occupied almost exclusively by fags — when a couple passed behind them in full conversation.

"Do you know that man Sladen ?" asked Tony casually.

"Yes," said Webb, "I sit behind him in form. — Rather a good man ; but not half as good a bat as he was made out to be."

"Have you ever heard him mention my name ?" Tony went on.

"No, I don't think so," said Webb slowly, in a puzzled tone.

"Well, will you mention my name to him to-morrow, just for fun ?" said Tony.

"Well, I don't know," said Webb. "Oh, all right. I suppose I will. But what is . . . ? Are you . . . ?" Webb could not formulate his question.

"I should like to see if he jumps," said Tony, with an unconvincing smirk.

The next day, after third hour, Tony waited for Webb outside the buildings. He caught a glimpse of him ; rushed up to him ; took him by the sleeve, and "What did he say ?" he whispered.

"Who ?" said Webb dully.

"Sladen, you fool. Didn't you ask him ?"

"Oh, him," said Webb, with some boredom. "Oh, yes, I asked him if he thought you were a good bat ; and he said, 'Yes, but a bit mad, isn't he ?'"

A bit mad ! Tony was silent, wounded. Webb glanced at him, and went on : "So I asked him why ; and he said, 'Because he's always got such a dreamy stare.'"

Tony turned round quickly : walked in the opposite direction. Not that he knew or cared what direction it might be. Why go anywhere ? A bit mad ! Why do anything ? What was the use ? He ran into his study : threw himself down on a chair. He must sit still. He must shut his eyes. — Or perhaps he would really go mad. Such a dreamy stare ! He must hold on. At all costs, he must preserve his sanity.

A fortnight passed while he brooded over this news. Sladen thought him mad . . . 'such a dreamy stare.' Of course he could not look at Sladen in chapel now ; and — he had really better not go out after tea. Sladen might think that he was dreaming. A bit mad. Good God ! If he couldn't look at Sladen, what the hell was the use of being at school, of being alive ?

He played cricket seriously, grimly. He was tried for the XXII. He failed conspicuously. He was sent in first and was out third ball. Would he be tried again ? He crept on to the list at the bottom of the page. They put him in eighth this time. He made 35. In the last 2nd XI match of the term he made a solid 47. They gave him his XXII. He took comfort. There were three weeks of the term still left. Faint heart . . . (He had never yet, after all these months, spoken one word to Sladen.)

On the evening after the match when he had made his 47, Tony walked into Webb's study. Webb had been glad of Tony's success.

" I say, Webb, will you do something for me ? "

" Of course," said Webb. (After all, it had been a good innings.)

" Well," said Tony, " would you think me very stupid if I asked you to tell Sladen to-morrow that I think he's a really frightfully good man ? "

Webb glanced at him doubtfully. " Yes," he said slowly, " I'll do that. That is, if you really want me to," he added.

Tony considered for a minute or two.

" No," he said at last, " don't do that. Ask him if he'll come down and talk to you by the mere to-morrow evening, will you ? "

Webb nodded. " I'd rather do that," he said.

2

Again Tony lay in wait for Webb after the third hour. Again he rushed towards him. Webb smiled patronisingly.

" He's coming," he said.

That evening Tony ate three pieces of bread and butter for tea, and left the room, glancing anxiously back in the direction of Webb to see that he wasn't likely to eat too much. Long before the first twoers were gathering in small groups on the Round, long before the men with 1st XI hat-bands were uttering their gigantic laughters on the grass of the Quad, Tony and Webb had settled themselves above the solitary group of willows at the far end of the mere. It was mid-July, and the deep green water was covered with midges. Tony leant forward and looked at his face in the mere ; involuntarily he tilted his hat a bit to the right. He smiled. He was thinking of an old saying : ' All things come to him who waits.' A green dragon-fly hummed past him. He looked up — up to where the avenue of elms ended, and the road opened fan-shape into three grass tracks down the eighty yards slope to the mere. And, as he looked, the first pair of figures appeared beyond the last elm. Tony held his breath. But it was not Him. Tony could tell Him half a mile away, so well did he know that easy, almost arrogant, walk, and the exaggerated swing of the arms. A walk that suggested something of the artist and something of the athlete. Couple after couple appeared over the crest ; the first pair had already reached the far end of the mere.

Tony became irritable. " Are you sure he'll come ? " he demanded.

Webb shrugged his shoulders. " Look," he said simply. Tony looked up. Framed in the crimson rays on the

trunks of the two nearest elms, standing still with someone he did not know, and looking down at the mere beneath, was Sladen, a creature of the summer sun. For a moment it seemed that they were going to turn back ; suddenly they started to come down the slope. Tony was enraptured. Every colour had come into the sky to do Him homage ; the midges sang ; the trees grew sudden souls ; and the green mere shone like opal.

*Open the temple gates unto my love !
Open them wide that he may enter in !*

By now they were walking along the side of the mere. Hell ! They had stopped to talk to another couple. Congreve was the man with him. Oh ! couldn't they see that they were wasting time ? Tony was by turns thrilled and anxious. Here they were. They were level. Hell ! They were going past. Tony tugged at Webb's jacket. "Say something," he whispered.

"I say, Sladen," Webb called after him, "what's the maths for to-morrow ?"

Sladen paused and turned.

"I don't know, Webb," he said.

There was a pause. Tony stared, unable to utter, unable to think. Sladen seemed about to go on again. Then, "Oh, by the way, Roretton," he said, "gratters on your 47. Dam' good show, I thought."

"Oh, thanks awfully," said Tony, purple with embarrassment. "It wasn't any good, I'm afraid ; I mean I was frightfully lucky."

"Dam' good innings," said Sladen, with all the conviction of the embryo blood.

By this time Webb had concocted an opening gambit.

"I say," he remarked, "do tell us what the Head Bean said to you about your crib."

The gambit was a successful one. Sladen sat down opposite Webb. "Do you know," he said, "the flaming man simply wouldn't believe that I was capable of having a crib without using it ; and actually swiped me for it."

Congreve sniggered, and Webb made a cooing noise presumably indicative of sympathy. Tony was too attracted by the rich mellowness of Sladen's voice to say anything. But the conversation came more easily. They talked of House matches, and the last two places in the XI ; and the monitors in Tower Hall. At last, quite irrelevantly, Sladen said, "Have you heard Moody's latest ? It's pretty rich." And there followed a fairly coarse story about a 'bus conductor which Tony did not appreciate, but at which he laughed uproariously. Down the Avenue and over the hill came the sound of a bell ringing. All four got up and walked back together. When they stepped into the Avenue, Sladen thought that he and Congreve would have to run. Tony gathered his courage. "Will you be going to Coney Hill to-morrow ?" he said. Sladen was already some way down the Avenue.

"I expect so, yes," he shouted over his shoulder.

That night Tony offered up a fervent thanksgiving. What a wonderful day it had been, and Sladen was still on the pedestal, even though it appeared bronze instead of gold. After fifteen weeks. . . . And, as he lay in bed, he lived over again every one of those enraptured minutes. That page in his diary would be memorable. At last he turned to Atkinson in the bed next to his. "Do you know any good stories ?" he asked.

"No," said Atkinson. "Why on earth ?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Tony. "I'm just beginning to collect them, I suppose."

Coney Hill was the asylum of the Towers Hill fag. Thither he repaired in Sundays after a week of close confinement to the Round, ensured by a system of compulsory games, and punctuated by irritating and incessant calls of "Boy." Coney Hill was a strip of sloping woodland about three miles from the school, planted sparsely with Scotch firs, and dissected by grass rides. And beneath these distant pines, and in these remote clearings, the little parties of fags and twoers would foregather in the blazing Sunday afternoons in July, and talk and smoke and tell stories, and rejoice in their temporary respite from the fetters of House Exclusiveness. About once every year some officious prefect would descend upon the hill from the far side and stumble upon some party of fags in full smoke. There would follow a swiping; and a universal outcry against the violation of the sanctuary. The officious prefect would find it hardly worth the candle; and the burden of purging Coney Hill would be handed on to Posterity.

All the burning afternoon of the next day, Tony and Webb sat on the railings by the gate through which every one passed into Coney Hill. But of the hundred and fifty or so fags that passed through, Sladen was not one. Tony walked back to the school speechless and utterly crest-fallen. Just as they were going into the House, he turned to Webb and said :

"Will you ask him what he thinks of me?"

The next day Tony heard the result : Did Sladen think Roretton a good man? Oh, yes, quite. Tony was wracked with a hopeless uncertainty. On Monday evening they went down to the mere again. Rather late, Sladen and Congreve came and sat with them. Tony fancied that somehow he was getting on better.

The week wore on ; and Tony spent the days looking forward and the nights looking back. Saturday evening came ; and Tony realised that there were only two Sundays left. He took the plunge. "Shall we see you at Coney to-morrow, Sladen?" he asked.

There was a pause. "Yes," said Sladen at last, "we'll see you at the gate at about four."

"How marvellous!" said Tony gratefully.

After Sunday morning chapel he ran up to Webb. "You'll be quick out of lunch, won't you?" he said eagerly.

"Why?" said Webb.

"Because we want to get there early, you ass," said Tony.

"Oh!" Webb drawled. "Didn't I tell you? Well, I'm not coming any more walks with you. You can do your own dirty work for a change."

Tony was horrified. Sladen had at last consented to meet him at Coney, and here he was left without anyone to go with.

"Oh, do be a sportsman," he muttered.

"No," said Webb finally.

Tony ran out of the study and banged the door. He rushed round the House asking any and everyone to go for a walk with him. But they were all going with someone. At last he walked into Lister.

"Going for a walk to-day, Lister?" he said.

"No," said Lister. "I hate walking."

"Well, do come this afternoon, just this once," Tony pleaded.

"No," said Lister.

"Oh, yes, please, please."

"Oh, all right, then," Lister muttered.

And with much difficulty Tony got Lister to the gate into Coney Hill by about a quarter to four. For half an

hour they waited. Tony's heart sank. Would Sladen fail him again? He grew weary of watching the road. He turned and sat facing the wood. Better that Sladen should come upon him suddenly. He could just see two thin coils of smoke rising no more than twenty yards into the wood. Another twenty yards beyond the smoke Tony glimpsed two figures running across a ride with their straws in their hands. Tony gasped. Was it . . . ? Lister had seen them too. "Look at that man Sladen scooting off up there," he said innocently. "There's a Bad Man, if you like."

It was as Tony had thought : Sladen and Congreve had been running away to avoid him.

Without a word he pulled Lister off the railings and started for home.

"What could have made Sladen run like that?" he said at last.

"Business, I expect," replied Lister. "Shall I ask him?"

"Do you know him?" asked Tony in astonishment.

"I do extra work with him," came the answer. "And you can take it from me that he's none too pi." That had chipped a flake off the idol. And, though Tony tried to ignore it, he knew that the pedestal shook.

"I asked him," said Lister the next morning. "But all he did was to tell me something about you," he went on with a crafty smile. Tony did not altogether like Lister. For the remaining week of the term he went about during the day with Malone, a pleasant childish Irishman, and only after tea with Lister, who was evidently quite a confidant of Sladen's ; and Tony noticed that the latter's language was always looser when Lister went with him to the mere. Sometimes Malone came as well ; and then Sladen would seem on his best behaviour.

On Saturday morning, after early school, Lister walked importantly up to Tony.

"Now you've done it," he said ominously.

"What?" said Tony.

"Sladen and Congreve were swiped by Henley last night for talking to us at the mere. Sladen's absolutely wild ; and told me to ask you to be careful and not speak to him again this term."

"That swine Henley!" Tony muttered, and began at once to map out a revenge. Henley had dared to touch his Sladen ; to swipe him. Tony fumed helplessly.

He stayed in the House all Sunday. On Tuesday they were to start for camp. Sladen was not going. And what had the whole summer term produced? A bare acquaintanceship, which had resulted only in Sladen's being beaten. And still he did not know whether Sladen cared at all.

Monday morning came.

"Say good-bye to him for me, will you?" said Tony to Lister, and all that day he shut himself up in the House. After tea Lister came up to him. "I said good-bye to him," he said, and then, seeing Tony's misery, "I am sure he likes you, you know," he said. "And, incidentally, he told me the reason why he cut you that Sunday ; but I don't think I'd better say."

It took Tony a quarter of an hour to get Lister to tell him.

"Well," he announced at last, "he wanted to find Malone."

"Malone?" said Tony incredulously. "You don't mean he . . . ?"

"Yes," said Lister grimly.

I X

THIS GREAT ARMY

I

THE corps, Lister had said, was a bore.

But camp, Tony gathered, was different. Camp could be tolerated. Under certain circumstances camp could even be enjoyed. That is to say, always provided : that one wasn't corps-mad ; that the weather was fine ; that one wasn't mess-orderly ; that there was only one parade a day ; that one was among not unpleasant tent-fellows ; that the palliasses were well filled.

Tony liked travelling up in the train to the temporary camp on the Yorkshire moor ; that is, until that stage of the journey when his newly-acquired sixpenny pipe made him long for a pinch of chloroform. Also he enjoyed his first night. There is a something of adventure in sleeping for the first time without a roof above one ; in being able to put one's head outside the flap, and wave to the naked stars and catch the moon *en déshabillé*. But waking up in the morning was not so pleasant. He had a vile headache, and no uniform visible. Also there was a mist. No, camp in the early morning is no place for the aesthete. It was an awful bore getting one's kit out, and folding one's blankets in the fatuous way devised by the Army. Still, parade was not devoid of amusement. There is possibly no sight so humorous as a Junior O.T.C. officer conducting himself with nicely-graded importance in front of his company. And it pleased Tony to see Captain Wellings, the adjutant, who on the Round at

Towers Hill had been accustomed to puff himself out like a pouter-pigeon and roar authoritatively, here on the battalion parade-ground roaring as meekly as any sucking-dove. Besides, the parades were different ; they consisted largely of lying in the August heather and watching demonstrations that were usually invisible, and incomprehensible always. Perhaps the regular Army was not so tedious after all.

And it was good to see Major Winnington, who at school spent the parades striking Napoleonic attitudes for the benefit of recruits and possible visitors to the school, padding along the dusty roads with 'the men,' while Regular officers of low degree rode comfortably on horseback.

The first day of this camp was especially hot. After 'dinners' at three, Tony lay down on his kit and bared his neck and chest. Out of a clear sky the sun glared down on him ; in the next line a thin-toned gramophone was playing 'Waiting for the Moon.' Life was good. From this pleasing coma Tony was jolted by someone asking him to come for a stroll. He opened his eyes. It was Canning, a fellow a year older than Tony, and rather a friend of Webb's.

"Right-ho!" said Tony.

And swagger-canes in hand, they walked down the lines, past where the adjutant was washing, and past the tent-flap through which a glimpse could be caught of the Commanding Officer in his pants, and so to the canteen. They sat down at a table on the very outside of the N.A.A.F.I. Canning went to get something to eat. Tony gazed at the motley stream that flowed in and out and past. He wondered whether Hatton were at this camp ; and what school it was that wore those loud red-and-green stockings ; and whether those people playing cards in the inner room lost many shillings an hour. And

while he was thinking how glad he was that Towers Hill did not wear its initials on the front of its sweater. Canning arrived with the food. The melon was unripe ; but the still ginger-beer had an unusual and a pleasing flavour.

"Are you glad the term's over ?" Canning asked suddenly.

"No, not particularly," Tony replied, "only that I'm not sure that I could go on working. Still, I'm sorry in a way, because the people at home are so much duller."

"Yes," said Canning, "that's just it. I don't want to leave the people here. And most of all I didn't want to go away from Merrivale."

Tony looked up quickly. Canning had not said much, but he had meant a good deal. Tony wondered why he had been honoured by Canning's confidence. Merrivale — the precocious new boy standing on a bench — the promising, somewhat sinister Colts cricketer.

"How well do you know him ?" Tony asked.

"Hardly at all," Canning laughed quietly. "In fact, the only eight words he has spoken to me are : 'Do you know the time, Canning ? . . . Thanks awfully.' That was when I was umpiring in Leagues."

Tony nodded sympathetically. He understood so well.

"You see," Canning went on, "he has so many other people to speak to."

"I see," said Tony. He liked Canning, he was so frank, and warm-hearted, and unselfish.

"By all accounts, Merrivale's rather shallow, isn't he ?" Tony asked.

"Yes," said Canning reluctantly. "They say," he went on irrelevantly, "he's got a frightfully pretty sister. And he's apparently never tired of saying that she's got about seven *fiancées*."

For some time they sat watching the people. Then :

"You'll tell me some more some time, won't you ?" said Tony, as they got up to go.

Alone again, Tony laughed to himself. What a queer place this camp was. It reminded him of a scene out of *Vice Versa*. A place where one treated monitors like twoers, and obeyed officers only on parade. Where, from three o'clock onwards, one was bound by no time-table or menu, and enslaved to no bell or gong ; where one struck up spontaneous and delightful acquaintanceship with various and improbable people. 'Friendships are fictions founded on some single momentary experience.' Well, there might be something in that.

After tea that day Tony went to the hairdresser's, where he encountered Dykes, who, to his amazed horror, asked : "And how's Sladen ?" — (for Dykes was a gossip) — and where for the first and only time in his life he was shaved by a razor other than his own. He came back to find the Towers Hill lines almost entirely empty. The only visible person about, was one Banton, in the Hall, who was brushing his hair in front of the tent mirror.

"Where's everyone ?" Tony called out.

"Gone to the flicks or the bathing-pool," Banton answered, without looking up. Tony remembered his voice now ; he had had a short conversation with him one evening at the mere.

"What's the film ?" he shouted.

Banton looked up. "East of Suez," he said.

Simultaneously the same idea occurred to each of them. "Shall we go to it ?" they said together. Such was the single momentary experience. The friendship, fictitious or otherwise, was destined to last, with intermissions, for another three years.

One couldn't help liking Banton, in spite of all his vanity for his hair. Tony liked him at once, immensely but prosaically. Had Tony never seen Sladen, he might

have liked Banton poetically ; but the ideal, the Ideal of the One Perfect Friend, must not be interfered with. This evening they hardly looked at the film at all ; there were so many exciting things to say. Besides, Banton obviously appreciated Tony's conversation ; and Tony enjoyed being obviously appreciated.

" I'm going to tell you something," he said at last, " something about Sladen in your House."

" Oh," said Banton with a smile, " I know it."

" Good heavens ! " Tony exclaimed, " do you ? Do many people ? "

" A good many," said Banton. " But what does it matter ? "

And what, as a matter of fact, did it matter ?

As they walked back from the camp cinema, Banton said winningly : " What's your name ? "

" Tony. And yours ? "

" Ronny. And I'm going to call you Tony," said Banton firmly. And Tony smiled.

2

As the day grows older, camp becomes more tolerable. Dusk between the rows of half-lit tents is pregnant with romance. Officers in black mess uniform, bloods in willow pattern pyjamas, and gruff little sergeant-majors carrying tent-candles, become forgivable and even lovable in the weird half-light. And ' Lights out ' sounds ; and conversation is razed to a whisper ; and the men in mess uniform, officers once more, patrol the lines for half an hour or so, like any common constable. Then one by one they drift away to their tents, until at about twelve o'clock the lines are deserted and the tents look like so many miniature mausoleums.

Tony could not sleep his second night in camp. Not

that he really wanted to. The stifling summer night would have been wasted if he had spent it in entire oblivion. At about midnight something brushed against the side of his tent, which happened to be the last tent in the row, and the one nearest to the strip of trees, beyond which lay the moorland. Tony raised the flap and looked out.

A figure dressed in flannels and sweater was worming its way across the open space to the belt of trees. A few seconds - and Tony could have grabbed by the collar the second figure that squirmed past his tent on its stomach. Tony watched them disappear ; then, a little enviously, he pulled down the flap. What an adventure ! What a wonderful adventure !

Next morning, as they lay on a hillside watching a demonstration by Tanks, Canning came and sat by him.

" I went out last night," he said, " with Malone, and Robertson in Kipp's. It was a marvellous night ; we took rugs and a melon, and went and talked and ate by the bathing-pool."

" About what time was that ? " Tony asked.

" Just after twelve." Canning replied.

" What fun, Canning," said Tony admiringly. Suddenly he remembered. " Did you say *Malone* and Robertson ? " he asked.

" Yes," said Canning, " Hugh Robertson wanted Malone to go with him, but Malone wouldn't go by himself. So I went too."

Tony sighed. Here were further complications.

All the time he was not on parade for the rest of the week Tony walked about with Ronny. Every misty morning turned out boiling hot. Every afternoon they would lie in the long grass by the pool and watch the bathing ; and, later, in the cool of the evening, they

would go for long, leisurely strolls in the brittle purple of the heather, walking only when they wanted to walk, and talking only when they had something to say — a state of affairs not far remote from freedom. Really, Tony was getting to like Ronny almost as much as Ronny liked him. And it was with something of the impartiality of the surgeon that Tony listened to Ronny's impersonal dissections of Sladen's looks and character. For Ronny evidently knew him well.

"Of course, Peter Sladen is hellishly good-looking. But he does look a tough ; and he certainly is one," he would say. " Honestly, Tony, you won't find an ounce of poetry in him — just as there's none in me. But he's a fine animal all right."

On Sunday evening they arranged to go for a walk at midnight. But when it came to the point, Tony found that it needed all his courage to go and tap on Ronny's tent. Would Ronny never answer ? That must be an officer up there. He tapped furiously. A hand appeared under the flap ; a low "Coming" was audible inside and Tony instantly skirted along the twenty yards to his own tent. He had taken off his shoes and stockings ; and as he passed he could hear Winnington still moving about in his tent. Down on his stomach he went, and crawled across the open space to the trees. Once in the shadow, he turned over on his back and lay gazing at the stars. A minute, and there was a rustle in the grass. It was Ronny, breathless and bleeding at the hand.

"I was damned nearly pegged by Winners," he whispered. "He was standing in his door when I crawled past."

With considerable caution and not a little pain (for the twigs dug viciously into their bare feet) they made their way up the belt of trees and out of the area of the tents. At last they were clear.

They were free, free, free — talking and running and laughing beneath the dark, conniving sky, while everyone else was lying, hogging it in the foetidness of a tent. Madly, satirically, like twin bacchanals, they ran over the crackling heather, until Tony's bare feet found an old trench and brought him ponderously to the ground. More soberly they proceeded. This, after all, was Yorkshire ; not Mount Cithaeron. There was a sudden sheen at their feet. They had all but walked into the bathing-pool. They sat down. Tony produced some Toblerone which they ate in silence. He was thinking that this was indeed good ; but that, with Peter instead of Ronny, it would have been perfect — ideal.

"What's your idea of supreme bliss, Ronny ?" he said at last.

"Being able to talk to the person you like best, alone, at night," came the telepathic answer.

Another silence. "Shall I write to him, Ronny ?" Tony said suddenly, in a voice which seemed megaphonic in the crystal, midnight air.

"Of course," said Ronny, "only keep it to earth as much as possible."

For a quarter of an hour they sat there in silence.

"Ooh !" exclaimed Tony at last. "What was that ?"

"What ?" breathed Ronny.

"Oh, look !" said Tony. "It's a sort of grasshopper." And, looking down, Ronny saw that a big green grasshopper had hopped into the palm of Tony's hand.

"A minute, a year," said Tony cryptically, and began at once to count aloud, each figure counted representing a second past. Somewhere around 100 the grasshopper collected itself and vanished.

"A hundred," said Tony. "That's a minute and three-quarters. Nearly two years. He'll stay nearly two years, Ronny !" he cried exultantly.

And obscurely, through the mist of unaccountable happiness that had descended upon him he tried in vain to recall the story of Bruce and the Spider.

3

Tony went straight back to Burnans from camp. After tea, he sat on the sofa with his mother. After a little she said :

" And you've had a happy term, my darling ? "

Tony looked up at her quickly. (She was so wonderfully warm.) He wanted to tell her all about Peter ; all about their Sunday walks and the magic evenings by the mere. He wanted to say, " Mummy, I'm in love with a boy, the most beautiful boy in the world." But he said only :

" Yes, mummy ; pretty happy."

For he felt that she would be hurt and perhaps frightened if he told her. And, anyway, he could never have got out the words. For inside himself he was still hopelessly twisted and dumb.

He could not even begin composing his letter to Peter at Burnans.

A fortnight passed ; and, on a Tuesday evening late in August, Tony walked into his cousin's cottage on the green hills above Sidmouth. The object of Tom Wendle's life had formerly been to produce in water-colours a selective representation of the English countryside, i.e. to sketch. Nowadays that object was merely to play at keeping as much of the English countryside as possible between himself and Burnans Manor — a game in which Sir Francis invariably left him a miss in baulk. And it was with his eyes full of the salt of the autumn sea, and with his mind full of the memories of the summer mere, that Tony sat down in his bedroom on this first night to compile his letter to Peter.

Of course, there would have to be a rough copy. Ca va sans dire. How to start ? ' Dear Sladen.' Curt, far too curt. ' Dear Peter.' Still rather terse. ' My dear Peter.' Too familiar, but at the same time not affectionate enough. ' My very dear Peter.' Too like a film heading : sentiment.

Which ?

Tony shook his fountain-pen out on to the floor. He would leave it blank for the moment. But it would certainly be ' Peter ' and not ' Sladen.'

' Pardon this familiarity,' he went on, ' but I hate using surnames in the holidays, don't you ? I must just write and apologise for getting you swiped like that by Henley. What an utter swine the man is. And those evenings by the mere were so marvellous. I wonder if you enjoyed them at all ? I just lived for them.'

' You are amazing. Why didn't you want me to know what you thought about Malone ? God knows I wouldn't have minded ; he's certainly amusing.'

' There were a good many rich incidents at camp. I expect you will be interested to hear that Malone and Robertson — had you heard of that ? — went out one night together. As a matter of fact, I think Canning was there too.'

' Camp produced two pretty creamy ones. [And here there followed a limerick connected with a well-known town in the Midlands, and a joke concerning Adam, which is now universally appreciated at English Public Schools.]

' Hope you've been making runs,' he went on. ' Please, please write to me ; you don't know what a difference it would make.'

How to end? Again Tony shook out his pen. He had it. (Was it Lister that had suggested it to him last term, in fun?)

‘ Ever your affectionate friend,
TONY.’

Tony read it through. But, aloud, it sounded rather inadequate. He had somehow said a good deal that was superfluous; and he hadn't laid half enough stress on the important sentences. At last he decided for ‘ My dear Peter.’ It seemed to be the golden mean. Heavens! would he know who ‘ Tony ’ was? Of course, he'd be sure to guess. Still, safer to put ‘ Roretton ’ in.

‘ Ever your affectionate friend,
TONY RORETON.’

No good at all. Far too business-like. What was to be done? Inspiration: put a bracket round Roretton.

‘ Ever your affectionate friend,
TONY (RORETON).’

And, without allowing himself time to alter his mind, Tony copied it out; he then licked the envelope and sealed it very deliberately with some pale green sealing-wax that he had bought for the purpose.

22 Zencombe Road,
Maidenhead.

A day and a half to arrive; a day to write the answer; and a day and a half to get back. For four days Tony's peace of mind was undisturbed. On the fifth morning he woke up sweating violently at the hands. Tie and collar

were scrupulously arranged, and teeth were cleaned twice over. Then, very anxiously, he began the journey downstairs. Half way down; and he found that he had forgotten his handkerchief. The first ten steps had all to be done again. This time he hardly dared peer over the banister. The last small flight of stairs he took in a jump. Then he turned and faced the hall table. There was a substantial pile of letters: that would be for Cousin Tom; there was also one single forlorn bluish envelope. That would be It – for him. Eagerly he pounced on it. ‘ Please forward. Miss Joan Duveen, c/o T. A. Wendle, Esquire.’

“ Hell! ” he said, and dropped it like a thing unclean. At half-past five he met the postman at the door; but there was no comfort to be had there. The next morning he ran out on to the landing on the way to his bath and peered over the banisters. The familiar pile for Cousin Tom was there. But that was all.

Nine o'clock and half-past five came and went in quick succession; and the days slipped by. Still no letter. What could have happened? Sladen had been offended, bored, irritated. Tony had not sent it to the right address. Perhaps he had never posted it. What could have happened? Tony was tortured by the appalling possibilities. Only two things were capable of distracting his mind from its morbid brooding: the cinema, with its cheap but seductive music, and the car, with its oblivious windy speed. Music and pace – and even they not cures, but palliatives. The days that had elapsed since he had written became weeks, and necessity drove Tony back to Burnans. But how could he ever go back to school? How could he face Sladen, scornful, bitter, contemptuous? He couldn't. He would rather die.

But time went on, as even Sir Francis, for all his Hold Hards, was powerless to stop it going on; and, when

September 19th came, Tony realised that one couldn't just refuse to go back to school. Had he even hinted at his state of mind, his mother would have exhorted him to 'stick it like a man'; and his father would have assured him, conventionally enough, that it would do him good 'to go and have his behind kicked a bit more.'

He must go. To avoid the crowd, he caught an earlier train. And on arrival at Towerston he slunk out of the station and made a dash for the nearest taxi. Once inside, he pressed himself back and down into the farthest corner and drew his hat a little more over his right eye. And for the rest of that evening he sat in his study, thankful that so far he had been spared the inevitable encounter. Canning arrived; and, without preliminaries, Tony told him about the offending letter. Canning was genuinely sympathetic; and Tony felt slightly comforted.

But the dawn came in relentlessly. As long as possible, Tony put off the evil moment. Until five minutes before call-over time he stayed in the House. (How infinitely he now preferred the House to the school; it had not always been that way.) Well; the clock had struck. He must be going.

In the Avenue he caught sight of Congreve and Garham. Was it his imagination, or did Congreve really leer to himself as Tony passed? The very next person he saw was that mischief-maker Dykes. There could be no mistake about *his* leer. And he was coming up to speak to him too.

Dykes had indeed a word for Tony's ear. As he stopped in front of him, Tony could not help noticing how dirty his red face looked.

"How do you do, Dykes?" said Tony civilly.

But Dykes went straight to the point.

"I'm sorry for you," he said with an unpleasing smile.

"How do you mean?" asked Tony, instantly apprehensive.

"That letter," said Dykes. Tony's heart sank.

"Why?" he said. "Was he absolutely wild about it?"

"Oh, no," Dykes purred sweetly. "Oh, Lord, no. *He* didn't mind. Only" — he lowered his voice significantly — "only his mother happened to read it."

X

THE MILK TRAIN?

BITTER-SWEET were to be the first weeks of this Michaelmas term. Every day Tony strolled wearily about the Round, or played abstractedly a game of fives or football. In the autumnal earth there was little enough comfort. Even the once resolute turf yielded now to the tread ; there was nothing of the 'Stand, quit you like stone, be strong' encouragement in this squidgy, effeminate grass. Across the Round, from the remote north-west, the wind brought up the rain. The reddish leaves went scurrying in little gusts down the Avenue. It was a riot of the dead. And very stealthily were the evenings drawing in, and very quietly were the sere leaves falling.

And one night early in October the wind came. It rocked the Hall flagstaff ; it whinneyed through the hygienic ventilators. It rattled against the dormitory windows, and made the lamps in the street outside flutter like dying souls. Next morning the Round was strewn with twigs and branches. Not a tree in the Avenue had a leaf left on it. For the first time in his life, Tony walked down to early school with Jennings. It seemed almost symbolically ironical. Jennings shivered.

"All the leaves are gone now," he said, half aloud.

What, thought Tony, did it matter ? To Jennings they were just leaves. Every autumn for fifty years they had withered and vanished in this same way. There would be some more in the spring as like as not - if there was a little snow and not too much frost, and if God was kind.

It was the same with the boys. They had disappeared every year like this in September ; but there were generally some more in the spring. Yes, thought Tony, but it is not spring now. It is winter.

It is winter ; and the mere is out of bounds. One is permitted to look at it from the end of the Avenue. There it stretches beneath one, desolate, with all its willows drooping. And there are no flies on its vapid surface ; and there are no bees in the stricken air. And no birds are singing.

*Sadly, sadly thus will I remember,
Thus will I remember, April laughs ; then dies.
And golden ways of yesterday
Fade, fade into twilight gray,
And beauty walks upon the hills, all garlanded with memories.*

The change lay heavy upon Tony's spirit. Peter seemed to reciprocate his anxiety for avoiding a conversation. From Dykes, who had wasted no time in setting himself up as go-between, Tony gathered that Mrs. Sladen, feeling herself not quite sufficiently grounded in Public School ethics, had sent Tony's letter on to her husband, then in America, with no uncertain recommendation attached to it.

Tony knew what that meant. It was evidently even chances as to whether Major Sladen would forward his letter to the Headmaster. If he did, the consequences were almost a dead certainty. He knew the Headmaster's views on sentiment. ("Besides, I have the good name of the school to consider.") Sir Francis would be requested to remove his son. Desperately unfair, yes ; but, also, only to be expected.

And Tony speculated mournfully on the not improbable situation which had always sounded so inconceivable.

Expelled ! It was like a school story. Vaguely Tony wondered whether all those expelled from Public Schools became criminals, or whether the Salvation Army got at some of them and rescued them. Expelled ! It was impossible. It was also true.

If there were only two weeks more till the American mail came in, he might as well enjoy them. But how could he ? He dare not make any effort to get nearer Peter. And the giants whom he could have been happy hero-worshipping had all left. The very tune of this term was different. It was impossible even to connect it with the Towers Hill of last summer, with its *leit-motif*, common perhaps, but haunting, of ' Fly home, Swanny Butterfly.' The tune did not even sound the same. It was like a man trying to recall a lost melody on a piano, long unused, and failing ; only to find that three of the keys have been broken in the interval, and produce nothing but a crumpled thud. Even Banton was cold to him.

A week passed. He could be sure of only seven more days now. And then, one afternoon, as he was watching fives, Sladen came up as if nothing at all had happened.

" I've never even seen you to say ' How do you do ' to, Roretton, have I ? " he said pleasantly, and before Tony could embark upon his apology he went on : " And thanks awfully for that letter of yours. I daresay Dykes told you about the disaster ? "

" Yes," said Tony. " I say, I'm most frightfully sorry about it. It was awfully silly."

" Not at all," Peter broke in. " It was quite my fault. I was just going to answer it, when my mater picked it up and read it. She was a trifle suspicious about the bits of information on Malone, and a bit huffy about the limerick, also she happened to catch me off my balance and not in my best lying form. So I just stood and gaped. And the old lady flew into a rage and posted it off to the pater. A

pity, because he may understand it better ; though he won't mind the limerick."

" Well, I'm frightfully sorry," Tony began again, but, noticing that these incessant apologies rather irritated Sladen than otherwise, he asked instead, " What will your father do about it ? "

" I don't really know," said Peter. " I shouldn't think he'd write to the Head Bean. But you can't really tell. It's all through that damned man Malone too ; I hate him, don't you ? "

Peter smiled charmingly as he walked away ; and Tony was a little comforted. In those few minutes' conversation he had been allowed a closer knowledge of Peter Sladen's real self than during the whole of the previous term.

The days passed on, propelled almost too quickly by the sympathetic look which Peter invariably had for Tony nowadays as he came out of chapel. The fifth, the sixth, and at last the seventh day arrived. That morning Tony prayed furiously ; desiring and at last assuring himself that, if already sent, the letter would be lost in the post. The seventh day crawled by, and by ' mousers ' no summons had been sent. In the middle of ' mousers ' he was informed that Jennings wanted to see him. His heart pattered violently as he walked along the passage to the study. He opened the door. Jennings was leaning on the back of a chair wearing his most lugubrious expression.

" Shut the door," he said grimly. " Well, you've been found out at last," he went on. And Tony felt himself turn very white.

" I have been informed," Jennings was saying, " that your soap has been disappearing at the most ludicrously short intervals. And this morning the maids found six cartons of the soap I have provided for you stuck into, and entirely obstructing, the ventilators."

So great was the bathos and relaxation of tension that Tony actually laughed.

Mr. Jennings stood still, plucking furiously at the lapel of his coat, dumb with rage.

"This impertinence will mean five hundred lines, Roretton," he said, "and I shall think of this when I come to think of making you a House prefect."

And Mr. Jennings shot out of the room, turning the light off as he went, and leaving Tony, happy and hysterical, to grope his way out in the dark.

The eighth day passed, and the ninth. Very nearly out of the danger area now. By lunch-time on the tenth Tony felt safe. "Good old Major Sladen, he's turned up trumps," he laughed.

Just after tea 'It' came.

"The Headmaster wishes to see Roretton without delay." So it had arrived at last!

It was raining outside. Tony put on his overcoat. The only thing for it was complete humility. The only chance. As he walked down the Avenue, he discovered that he was talking to himself. "You'll be all right. You won't have to go," he heard his lips saying. But his heart knew better.

He went into the passage leading to the study by the side-door. At the far end he could just see the dining-room table, and the decanters on the sideboard. That was the place whence the Headmaster would come to him from after his glass of sherry, and thither to eat boiled chicken and angels on horseback, he would return after pronouncing the words of expulsion.

Tony felt utterly miserable as he entered the waiting-room. The Headmaster was reading a typewritten document in the waiting-room chair.

"Go inside and wait for me," he said gravely.

The inside room repelled him. It always looked ugly;

to-night it was callous as well. He glanced at the photo of the elderly clergyman over the mantelpiece — obviously the Headmaster's father. What eyes the man had, thought Tony, what amazing eyes. "You must grovel, you must grovel," he was saying to himself again as the door opened.

The Headmaster sat down in his chair.

Tony had a great urge to speak, to say anything, to laugh. The Headmaster seemed to be looking into him, right into his Self.

"I suppose you know what this is about, Roretton," he said.

But, for all his panic, Tony was not going to concede points.

"Well, I'm not at all certain, sir," he replied humbly.

"When I tell you that I have just received a letter with an enclosure from Major Sladen, you will understand?" queried Mr. Vernon.

"Oh! Yes, I beg your pardon, sir," said Tony, with a conscious effort to appear penitent.

"And you understand that the matter is as serious as it can be?"

Tony hesitated. If he said "Yes" he was throwing up his case.

"I'm not quite sure that I see that, sir," he said at last.

"Um!" The Headmaster had evidently met with a check. Usually these sort of cases agreed with everything he said.

"Well, in the first place," he continued, "these rhymes are utterly obscene. Filthy garbage to impose upon a boy younger than yourself, Roretton. You surely will not excuse yourself from that?"

"No, sir," said Tony automatically. "But don't you think, sir," he added tentatively, "that they are such as

one might hear in any gentleman's smoking-room? In fact, sir, if I may say so [he had decided to lie; and to lie good and strong] — in fact, the second of them I heard last Christmas day at home — before we joined the ladies, sir."

"I see." The Headmaster paused; Tony noticed his advantage. "But I shouldn't have thought, Roretton, that you were the sort of person to follow a bad example."

The Headmaster coughed twice. This boy was being a little difficult; and, after all, there wasn't anything very much to catch hold of in the letter.

"But the most serious thing, Roretton," he continued, "is the general tone of this letter."

So it was coming at last, thought Tony. (What eyes the man had, what eyes!)

"It sounds to me as if this friendship of yours with Sladen is one of those which I consider the most pernicious possible. You realise that I have expelled boys before now for writing letters like this?" He paused; he was rapidly persuading himself that he had caught out a dangerous character. "You realise, Roretton," he went on, fixing him with his keen eyes, "you realise that I shall expel boys again for this same offence?"

It was the crisis. All that was dramatic in Tony's character rose to the occasion. He looked the Headmaster back in the eyes with a studied, unflinching stare.

"I don't quite understand, sir," he said very slowly and deliberately. "I'm very fond of Sladen. He is such a good fellow."

For a full minute the silence could be felt. For a full minute Tony and the Headmaster glared into each other's eyes — the one with the incisive, intuitive stare of the trained observer and judge of men; the other with the fear of something he did not understand holding him steady, and the necessity for the use of all his dramatic

power beating against his brain. (What eyes the man had, what maddening eyes!)

Suddenly the Headmaster drew back his chair.

"I accept your word, Roretton," he said quietly.

Tony sighed.

"But remember," he went on, "if I thought for one second that you were deceiving me, or that this friendship of yours was not entirely as it ought to be, I should have you removed from the school to-morrow. It is not only Major Sladen that I have to think of, but the good name of the school."

"Yes, sir," said Tony humbly, but distantly.

"I am not going to punish you in any way," Mr. Vernon was saying. "But, without suggesting or inferring anything, I would remind you of the truth of Christ's saying: 'Blessed are the pure in heart.' Do you understand me?"

Tony was bitterly hurt at this implied accusation. The Headmaster had asked whether he had understood; he should be told. After all, he was clear of danger now.

"Don't you think, sir," he suggested humbly but firmly, "it would be fairer to say: 'To the pure all things are pure'?"

"Ah, yes, Roretton," returned the Headmaster. "But you must remember that to love a girl is wonderful; to love a boy is damnable." He paused. Slowly he rose from his chair. "Well," he said, "this is all settled and finished. You may go, Roretton."

XI

‘L’AMITIÉ AMOUREUSE’

MRS. SLADEN’s jealous attempt to avenge what she evidently considered a blemish on her son’s honour created a perfectly natural and very real understanding between Tony and Peter. Peter’s nature was at last exposed to Tony – bluff and crude and robust, but infinitely warm and lovable. And Peter discovered a genuine liking for this unusual boy, with his extravagant phrases, romantic ideas, and poetical nature.

Through sheer difference of personality they were drawn towards each other – the one simple, open, frank, hearty, and material ; the other complex, theatrical, self-conscious, shy, and spiritualised. Peter was rather disgusted with his father ; but he was overjoyed with the Headmaster for ‘being such a stout man.’

One morning Tony met Peter coming out of second school. They walked up towards the shop together.

“What about going for a walk to-morrow ?” Peter said at last.

“Yes. Rather. I’d love it.” Tony was ecstatic at the idea. “Can we go alone ?” he added.

Peter hesitated. “Better not, I think. Sykes might not like it.”

“Right-ho. Who shall I bring ?”

“Oh, anyone,” Peter called after him.

Tony selected Malone to take with him ; partly because it pleased his theatrical sense, and partly because Malone was pleasant and frivolous, a creature of the

Celtic twilight, a blue boy. The walk was eminently successful – not like the walks of the summer term, but distinguished by woollen mufflers and gloves, and a great galloping stride and prodigious swingings of the arms. A walk made thrilling by Peter’s immense, robust mirth, provoked, for the most part, by his own large jokes at Malone’s expense.

Even Malone enjoyed it – enjoyed puckering up his brow and pouting, and trying to look hurt. And he really was quite sorry when, with the school bell ringing and the lamps just lit, Peter, waving hysterically and walking backwards down the Avenue, disappeared into the November dusk.

Tony enjoyed every moment of that Sunday evening chapel ; silent but enraptured, he stood as the last hymn, ‘Lead, kindly light,’ was sung. Everyone in the school but himself must have been singing it. It was good, that uniqueness.

He walked out of chapel exultantly ; his eyes shone like winter stars. He caught Peter’s glance at once ; a large, crude smile of pleasure it seemed to him. In the half-gloom outside the chapel door he waited, laughing quietly to himself for sheer joy. It was so splendid, this emotion of his. Over the heads of the crowd, he saw the brown hair with its almost imperceptible wave, and the highly coloured complexion.

He caught Peter by the arm. “Did you enjoy it ?” he asked.

“Hellishly,” said Peter. “D’you know, I think I rather like Malone again too. You might let me know what he thinks of me, will you ?”

“Rather,” said Peter. He walked on back to Jennings’s. “I rather like Malone again.” So it had started afresh ? Well, what did it matter ? Nothing could mar Tony’s happiness now. Besides, it was an opportunity of service.

"I'd do anything for you, Peter," Tony murmured confidentially to the misty stars.

And he broke into a swinging stride and his lips took up a familiar tune :

*"I'm sitting on top of the world,
Rolling along, rolling along."*

Inside the house he found Malone.

"Did you enjoy this afternoon?" he asked.

"I didn't mind it," said Malone without enthusiasm.

"Oh, but surely you liked it," Tony pressed.

"Yes, quite," Malone answered.

"And what do you think of Sladen?"

"He's all right," came the irritating reply.

Not very enthusiastic, thought Tony, but Malone was sure to mean more than he said. He sat down to compose the despatch demanded. For a moment he hesitated. Rather risky, wasn't it? He had had enough truck with paper and ink for a year or so, to be sure. An idea occurred to him.

He took a piece of school writing-paper. At the top he wrote :

'For Latin Sentences'

Then he thought for a minute.

'No. 1' - he continued at last.

'1. The Hibernians are a race inhabiting the marshes of Northern Hibernia. They are silent by nature (*reticeo*), but are easily influenced by persistence.'

'2. The Hibernian general informed his lieutenant that the march had been more than satisfactory.'

'3. He said that he was at present hampered by another alliance of long standing (use relative -

diutius) ; but he inferred that the time (*occultas*) would come.

'4. "How long, O Cæsar," asked the lieutenant, "must I wait before attempting my objective?"'

Tony read through his creation. It was safe ; it was informative ; possibly it was original.

The next morning he waited for Dykes after morning chapel. And, with rather too obvious a gesture suggestive of 'everything above board,' he handed him the large sheet of paper folded respectably in two.

That afternoon he met Sladen by the fives courts.

"Thanks for those sentences, Roretton," he said amusedly. "But I don't know how long, lieutenant. Though I daresay," he added, "until Cæsar pitches camp."

Tony smiled with pleasure. Slowly he walked back to Jennings's, 'rolling along, just rolling along.'

For what else could Tony do but sit tight on the top o' the world and roll along? He might perhaps have taken to thinking, wondering whether 'all this' would last, pondering whether Peter Sladen's somewhat earthly mind was capable of a spiritual affection for Malone, and dreaming ascetic dreams of distant responsibility. But Tony elected to surrender himself to the pleasure of the present, to the immortal moments that were even now running between his fingers. As soon as one starts to think, one starts to be unhappy.

*If young hearts were not so clever,
Oh ! they would be young for ever.
Think no more ; 'tis only thinking
Lays lads underground.*

Was there any excitement more intense than those grey December half-holiday evenings, when the bloods were

sitting by some dismal fire, and the earnestly respectable were poring over some drab Propertius, but when he and Malone would meander round the grounds, spiritually and mentally on tiptoe, now walking very slowly, and now running a few quick, guilty paces to skirt a hedge or to pass a tree? When nobody knew whether the corner of the gym might not be concealing the whole world, and when it was just too dark to tell whether or not that couple strolling on the far side of the road was Peter and another. When the tedious rugger balls were again on the rack, and the lights were lit in the shop; and when the Headmaster would doubtless have welcomed the gift of a great searchlight for the roof of the gym, to sweep the Quad and the Round at intervals of two minutes. But, failing this convenience, he had resorted to making 'lockers' continually earlier. Which, after all, worked almost as well.

It was always at evening that Tony felt that crying need for love — though perhaps at the time he did not realise that that was the thing he lacked. And he found the best substitute for it in those December dusks when the whole grounds were shrouded in mist, and the Round became a fairy garden, where young, exciting faces loomed suddenly out of the fog, and smiled, and beckoned, and were gone; and obscure figures stole past him, talking distantly, or with their eyes fixed upon the ground; and all the while in the dim background, prominent among the fantastic shapes, Merrivale ('my sister has about seven *fiances*') appearing and leering and vanishing, like some sinister, inevitable theme; and in the shadows of the ghostly buildings and beneath the flickering lamps, figures flitting to and fro unceasingly — eager, purposeful figures, minding their own exclusive business. And Tony would feel unreasoningly happy as he walked about with Peter and some other man in the

Hall through the safety of the curling fog, because he was one of so many glad uncertain people who were groping their aimless way through this mist within a mist. Foolish children of the twilight, playing at building cloud-castles on the outmost fringe of the grey tides of night. The tide would turn, and the cloud-castles would dissolve in the too powerful sunlight. What did it matter? It was high tide now.

It was high tide. On Sundays indeed it was more than high tide. Always on Saturday evenings Dykes was in the shop to arrange some fresh walk for the next day. Along the woods at the back of Coney Hill, with the air reeking with the smell of garlic plants; or walking the sleepers of the deserted railway line to Denbury; or exploring the outer lip of the downs. The appearance of freedom, and the friendliness of the December evenings, the silent countryside, and the freshness of his friends, made these Sunday walks the most exciting and enjoyable hours of the term.

On the third Saturday from the end, Dykes conceived what he considered to be a 'red-hot scheme.'

"To-morrow," he announced to Tony, "we will all go to a pub."

"Oh!" said Tony. He was not quite sure whether he entirely liked the idea. Of course, it would be romantic and unusual. Still, he didn't know whether he would appear at his best in a pub. He had never been in a pub in his life, and he felt that Dykes certainly had, and Peter too in all probability.

"You don't seem very braced with the scheme," Dykes had complained.

"Of course I am," said Tony. He could not refuse — Dykes would think that he was afraid.

"Right-ho," said Dykes. "Four o'clock to-morrow at the Coney cross-roads."

And at a little after four on the next day, Tony and Peter and Dykes and Malone were walking hard on the road round Coney. Dykes took them over a stile and across a couple of fields. They climbed over a low stone wall and found themselves in a very muddy lane. They were on the outskirts of a small hamlet and right opposite a little grey pub, which was flanked on one side by a cowshed and on the other by a slimy green duck-pond. Dykes went forward and knocked confidently upon the door. Tony looked up at the old sign. It was rocking slowly to and fro, and groaning now and then a little. Three ducks waddled across the road and subsided into the pond. There was a noise of the door being unlocked. A spaniel wriggled round the door and sniffed anxiously at Dykes's legs. A round face with a grey moustache peered round the door.

Dykes removed one of his gloves.

"Good afternoon," he said in a very quiet, unnatural voice. "Can you possibly give us tea?"

"'Ow many are you?" The red face was distinctly suspicious.

"Four. Could you do that?"

The man opened the door a little wider and eyed the group. Fortunately the spaniel had taken to the smell of Dykes and was revelling in it.

"Tea, you want, you say?" he questioned cautiously.

"Yes, please," said Dykes, with a monstrously vulgar wink, that seemed to be intended for everybody.

"All right, sir. Just go into the room on the left, will you?" he said. He was evidently satisfied. Dykes walked ahead, and the three others followed bemusedly. It was clear that Dykes had had no previous acquaintance with this place. Still, he hadn't managed badly. Tony took off his muffler and looked round the room. The pictures were chiefly hunting prints and colour photographs

of relatives. The wallpaper was of a tree pattern. The curtains and chairs were heavy and covered with some worn green material. Two hideous blue vases crowned the mantelpiece.

Dykes was looking from one to the other with the air of a man showing off a prize exhibit.

"Well," he said at last, "will this do?"

"Yes, I should think so," said Tony.

Malone said nothing. He was obsessed by a fear of being seen by prefects.

Peter sat down heavily in a chair. "What about a drink, though?" he said. The maid came into the room, and Dykes delivered himself of another monstrous wink.

The tea was an unusual one. There were tomato sandwiches and radishes and watercress. Malone became more cheerful. He ate quantities of watercress. Peter began to laugh at him.

Malone pouted.

"What's the great joke?" he asked.

"You," said Peter. "You eat like a rabbit."

"I don't." Malone puckered up his forehead.

The maid came into the room. Peter turned towards her and pointed at Malone.

"Doesn't he eat like a rabbit?" he said to her. The maid giggled, spilt the hot water, giggled again at Peter, and went out.

"Gad! You didn't waste much time there," said Dykes admiringly. Dykes had a fat, scarlet face, with eyes like a prawn's, set at a great distance from a snub nose. His lack of sex-appeal was a standing grievance to himself.

Dykes handed round a packet of cigarettes and went to look for the pub-keeper. Peter lit his hungrily. Tony tried to do likewise. Malone did not smoke.

Tony heard Dykes talking outside in the passage.

"Can we get a drink?" he was saying.

"Ay, sir. You can 'ave ginger-beer, lemonade, ginger ale?"

Dykes paused. "Can't we get a drop of beer?" he asked winningly.

"No, sir. 'Fraid not."

"A drop of shandy, then?"

"Well—" The pub-keeper was shuffling. "Well, you'll be getting me locked up."

"No, no, we won't do that," Dykes answered without assurance.

"Well, orl right, then, if you'll go into the bar."

Dykes walked back into the tea-room. "I've done it," he proclaimed grandly. "Now what's everyone having?"

Here was a further difficulty.

Tony was determined to show himself well up in these matters. "I'll have beer," he said.

Dykes eyed him disdainfully.

"Yes, but what sort of beer?" he asked.

Tony paused, baffled.

He said, "Oh, any sort."

"Mild, bitter, old?"

"Old," said Tony.

"So'll I," said Peter.

"Right. A pint, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Tony spontaneously.

"Personally," said Dykes, "I shall have port."

"What about you, Malone?"

"I don't really want anything, thanks."

"Oh, damn it, you can't be out of it."

Malone pouted a little.

"All right, I'll have the same."

They followed Dykes into the bar. They were faced by about half a dozen working men, who eyed their hats

and shoes curiously. Three of the men were playing dominoes on a small table by the fire, and two others were competing with each other to throw rubber rings into a wooden dish with a spike in the middle.

Tony felt nervous and uncomfortable. When his beer arrived, he took a quick gulp at it without any preliminary motion or remark.

Peter raised his mug towards Tony.

"Cheero," he said.

"Well," said Dykes, with an extravagant flourish of his port glass, "here's mud in yer eye."

Malone raised his mug vaguely and in silence. Tony leant back against the door and looked round the room. It was a comfortable little bar, with an oak bench running round the three walls, a low, beamed roof, and walls covered with advertisements for Bass and Guinness. He looked at the men playing dominoes. Two of them must have been well over sixty, and the third could not have been much more than twenty. His face bore a curious and untimely redness. He looked at Dykes, who was beginning to expand for the benefit of a man who appeared to be a postman.

"Nice to get clear of school for a day?" the latter was saying.

"Gad, yes!" said Dykes. "I couldn't exist without my weekly pint."

The postman chuckled. But Tony suspected that Dykes's pint was more termly than weekly.

Meanwhile, Peter was entering into competition with the two men playing quoits. Already at his first attempt he had got three out of the five rings on to the peg.

He took off his coat.

"I'll play anyone for drinks all round," he announced.

A sallow-faced man set his glass down with a clatter on the table.

" Taken, then," he said. " And you go on then."

This time Peter only threw two on. The painter scored with his first three shots, and then threw his last two comfortably wide of the disk.

Peter rummaged about in his pockets.

" What's anyone having ? " he said.

From the domino-table came a low growl of " Pints."

" Steady on," said the postman. "'Alves are good enough, aren't they ? "

" 'Alves, then," echoed the painter.

" No, no," said Peter. " I'm for a pint. So you'll damned well have to manage one."

Tony glanced at Malone, wondering whether his head would stand it. Malone was looking at his watch.

" Good Lord," he said, " we've only forty minutes before tea."

Hurriedly they gulped off their drinks and put on their coats.

Peter opened the door.

" Good night," he called back.

" Good night. Damn good beer," said Dykes.

" Good night, sir. Good night. Good night."

Once in the air again, Tony felt distinctly pleased with himself and his adventure. Dykes was looking somewhat portentous in his attitude of knowing how to hold his liquor. Peter's crude, bluff good nature had been kindled by the pace with which he had drunk his last pint. Malone was definitely tipsy. He insisted on running. And Peter saw no objection to the idea. Together they broke into an erratic trot which hardly carried them any faster than did Dykes's and Tony's sedate stride.

Hand in hand, Peter and Malone jogged over the stubble, endeavouring to regulate their pace by singing ' Three Blind Mice.' But the blind were only leading

the blind. Malone stumbled over a furrow and fell. Peter made no attempt to help him up, but stood conducting an imaginary orchestra to the old refrain :

*Three blind mice,
See how they run.
Three blind mice,
See how they run.*

Malone giggled convulsively. Peter had forgotten what happened after ' See how they run.' Tony and Dykes managed to pull Malone up, and succeeded in hauling him and Peter as far as the Towerston road.

As they turned the corner up to Towerston they all seemed to be walking with more rhythm. By this time Peter had discarded even ' See how they run ' and was beating an imaginary drum to ' Three blind mice, three blind mice,' and yet again ' Three blind mice.' Thus, rounding the next bend, they nearly walked right into Jennings. Dykes at once assumed an air of deferential importance. Malone half stifled a hectic giggle. Peter ceased the refrain, but continued his frantic beatings of the air. Tony tried to appear reverent. " Ready, steady, go," said Peter. And more or less together they raised their hats in the direction of Jennings, who, as was his wont when annoyed, stared at Tony and Malone as though he had never seen them before.

They had only gone a few paces past him when Peter gave vent to a gargantuan hiccup which drove the other three at once into hysterics. Tony heard his name called from behind him. He turned round, to see Jennings standing in a monumental attitude in the middle of the road. Tony walked back and raised his hat. Again Jennings made no sign of recognition. At last, in a sepulchral voice :

"I'm sorry, Roretton," he said, "to see *you* behaving in an uncouth and disorderly way."

There was a pause, while Tony waited to see if Jennings had anything more to say. At last :

"Yes, sir," said Tony vaguely, and walked away to the other three.

"What did he say?"

"Was he wild?"

"Has he given you anything?"

"Only a bit bored," said Tony. "Hadn't we better separate now?" he added.

"Right-ho," said Peter. "You and Hugh walk in front."

And as Tony and Malone turned up into the Avenue, who should they meet but Mr. Kitson, engaged apparently in imbibing the last dregs of the sunset.

Kitson acknowledged their raised hats with an almost exaggerated sweep of the hand.

"Have you had a pleasant walk?" he asked, with a little Puckish smile.

"Yes. Very good, thank you, sir."

Tony could not help feeling that this curious, inquisitive master in front of them must be possessed of second sight.

"Ah, yes," Kitson continued, with a slight raising movement of his eyebrows, as Peter and Dykes came into sight, "have you all had a successful walk?" Tony noted the suspicious way in which Kitson emphasised the word all.

Dykes and Peter were obviously trying to get past without being drawn into conversation. But Kitson, planting himself quietly in Dykes's path, said gravely :

"And I hope you kept dry, Dykes?"

"Dry, sir?"

All four of them glanced up at Kitson. His eyes were

smiling still, though his mouth was quite solemn. "Dry, sir?" Dykes repeated. "I—I suppose so."

"I mean," said Kitson very quietly, "that I hope you didn't get wet."

By this time Tony, who was always apt to jump to conclusions, was quite sure that Kitson had either second sight, or an even more efficient intelligence department than some people said he had. He looked at Peter. Peter was giggling. He looked at Dykes. Dykes was retreating in front of the gradually oncoming Kitson, in order to prevent that master detecting his beery aroma.

Suddenly Kitson turned in the direction of the masters' house and, as he began to walk away, said, in a much louder and less mysterious voice :

"I was only afraid that you might have been caught in that shower."

And, as his enormous figure loomed away under the shadow of the lamps, Tony saw his shoulders shaking with a large, mysterious laughter.

"Did he peg on?" said Peter dubiously.

"Not he," said Dykes. But Tony couldn't help wondering.

"God! That man's a swine," said Dykes, as Kitson finally disappeared from sight.

"Why?" said Tony. "I rather like him. He's got a sense of humour."

"A sense of humour! A sense of scandal, I should say. I've never known such an oiler. He greases round, just picking up gossip. He's the cause of more than half the strafes here."

"I like him," said Malone. "And if he likes you, you can trust him."

"Sooner trust the Devil," Dykes muttered.

That night during 'mousers' Sykes came into Tony's study.

"I say," said Tony casually, "what d'you think of that man Kitson?"

Sykes, as being the present Captain of the House, and a prospective doctor, had a fondness both for making speeches and for analysing people's characters.

"Kitson," he said. "Oh, he's a sound man. A man you must keep in with. Everyone consults him - Captains of Houses, House Matrons, new boys, the Headmaster. He's absolutely discreet. He would never admit that anyone confided in him, though he acknowledges that people 'state their opinions' to him. He is really interested in the boy mentality, and also in boys. But he doesn't 'talk down' to one. And he doesn't parade his understanding. He never has a tea by himself, and he seldom has a tea with more than one person. He likes to draw people out of themselves. And he masks it all in an appearance of never being serious. He tries to make up in dignity by his walk what he loses through roguishness in conversation."

And, on thinking it over, Tony felt that Sykes's analysis of Kitson was probably truer than Dykes's.

There was so much to say, which, when spoken, would sound ludicrous.... Tony kept fingering his pen. On Sunday evening after chapel he decided to cross the Rubicon. He cut a piece of school paper into two, and then into two again. Had he used notepaper and an envelope, anyone but the Headmaster might have been satisfied; as it was, he wrote on a quarter-sized slip and folded it till it could be folded no more; in such a way that the humblest House prefect could not have helped being suspicious of it. There could be no openness now; and

no gestures. It was extravagantly worded, this note, even for Tony.

'MY VERY DEAR PETER, - I can't tell you how much I enjoyed that walk this afternoon. I adore you; and I adore being near you. Shall I ever be able to be near you alone? Please, please send me that photo you promised me. And please do answer this. I think D. is quite safe.'

'With love,

'Yours ever,

'TONY.'

Tony smiled to himself. If anyone pried this time. . . .

The next morning in chapel he made a sign to Dykes. Immediately after breakfast, Tony, Vergil in hand, was out on the grounds. As if by telepathy, Dykes came out of the Hall door. Together they sheltered behind a corner of the gym. (One had, after all, to be cautious.) Tony opened the book, showed it to Dykes, and pointed to a line. Dykes's finger pointed to the same line. It was achieved.

There was a morning of horrid suspense. After second school Tony caught sight of Peter just going into the door of the Hall.

He smiled; quite definitely, he smiled.

So 'it' was safe; and approved of! 'For this relief . . . !' All the afternoon Tony waited. Just before third school he went out to the shop. There was Dykes, at the far end. What a terrible vulgarian, thought Tony. Still, he was rather indispensable. Heavens! Dykes was actually looking at him, nodding to him.

Lime-juice in hand, Tony went up to him.

"Well?" he said.

Dykes did not answer. Tony stared, aghast. What had

happened? Surely it hadn't been pegged? Suddenly Dykes's closed fist knocked against his hip.

"Take it, you fool," he heard him say.

Quickly Tony groped for Dykes's hand; but the two sets of fingers did not combine. A wad of papers fell, with what seemed to Tony a mighty crash, on to the floor. And there was Linton, a school prefect! He turned scarlet; of course, everybody would be looking at him. Instantly Dykes's practised shoe covered the offending papers. Actually, no one had seen.

"Pick it up, fool," he whispered.

Tony pulled his bandkerchief out; dropped it, and, stooping down, picked up both his possessions. Then, very thankfully, he ran out of the shop.

Where on earth could he go to be able to read it alone? There seemed to be nothing for it but the lavatories. Well, so be it. 'It' was a marvellous note, Tony considered; and for the first time Peter had used his Christian name in addressing him. Evidently he himself was not the only person who could write more than he could say. And what a superb little photo of Peter! Surely with this he could survive the holidays; perhaps even the bunting too!

Once the first caution had evaporated, notes came and went daily. Dykes's face may have been unwashen; but, as Peter remarked, there were no flies on his fingers. For all Tony's coaxing, Malone remained unmoved. Peter began to play the 'not caring a damn' rôle again; and became proportionately 'kind' to Tony.

Unfortunately, the long since soured Webb had at last taken in the full situation, and had organised a party of protest. 'For the sake of the House,' it was not good that Roretton, next year's House Cricket Captain, should spend his evenings slinking about the Round. And the "Good bunting this evening?" with which this group invariably

greeted his entry into the House, just as the 'lockers' bell was ringing, reminded Tony curiously of that mean jingle which had been concocted three years ago by the Headmaster and the more respectable boys of Meston House, High Merringham.

Even Canning began to remonstrate with him about his blatancy. But Tony went on his englamoured way, exulting. Were there not only five days more?

Four more days. . . . And all Saturday afternoon Tony stayed in the House, setting the final turrets to his castle in the hither air.

Three more days. . . . Sunday. In the middle of the afternoon, Lister walked in, to find Tony still in his study.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed. "It's not often the House has this honour on a Sunday afternoon."

"No, Liz," said Tony. "Funny, isn't it? I suppose Webb and Co. have gone to Coney to find someone to jeer at?" he went on as Lister sat down in the other chair.

"Yes," said Lister, "I suppose so. But you know, Tony, you do ask for it."

"Do I?" said Tony coldly. "Why?"

"Well, what the devil's the use of all this running about the Round? What are you aiming at? You're just groping."

"Groping?" said Tony. "Do you think so? Really, Liz, I should have thought that you at least would have known that when one receives an impression which is so strong as to become an obsession, one can run definitely fair or directly foul; the only thing one can't do is grope. And one can't grope, because one is held to a certain fixed course by a current as strong as a magnet."

"No, I'm not groping, Liz," he went on more quietly.

"I've for some time begun to get glimpses of what it was that first drew me to Peter; yes, and even what it was

that I wanted for him. It was in his voice, in his smile, and in the casual touch of his hand."

"Steady," Lister cut in. "Aren't you getting rather effeminate, with all this handy-pandy business?"

"Hellishly effeminate," retorted Tony fiercely. "More effeminate even than that so-terribly-effeminate-man David, whose love for his friend was wonderful, and passed the love of women. But, then, as Vernon so aptly puts it: 'David never meant anyone to take *that* seriously or literally.' It would be so inconvenient."

"Well, Tony," Lister began, "I really don't see yet what you're aiming at. Can't you forget about it in the holidays? Can't you fall in love with a girl?"

"Oh, Liz," said Tony, "I do wish I wasn't going home to-morrow. There is only one thing that makes it bearable at all. . . .

"There was a time, I remember, when I thought I should be content if he was just there, to see, to gaze at, sometimes to get a smile from. But now there are moments when I know that it is not enough. It is not enough that he should be just there. Isn't he there for three hundred others as well as for me? I know now that it is not enough. In these moments I know that I want him, all of him, as it were, to myself. I must have him for my own. No one else must be allowed to share him with me. I want to be terribly near him. Terribly, frighteningly near. I want to know that he is drawing ever closer to me. I want to be close, so close that nothing can ever come between us. But — that is all. I just want him to be utterly mine, even if it is only for a minute."

"A minute!" echoed Lister prosaically. "It doesn't seem much — all this hectic scurrying about — for a mere minute."

"Still, I think that is about what I have been aiming

at, Liz," said Tony. "Even if it was to be only for a minute," he went on, "it would be worth it. But, as a matter of fact, it will be for five minutes. For five minutes Peter will belong most perfectly to me. For five minutes this evening. . . ."

Tony went slowly out of the study, out of the House, out under the grey, winter sky. Somewhere a clock was striking the quarter to five. On the far edge of the Round one solitary dim figure stood.

Tony quickened his pace. He had no idea of what he was going to say to Peter. He would say whatever came into his head. Providence, he felt sure, looked after such situations as these. Peter was standing by the trunk of a colossal elm, and looking up between its branches to the frozen sky. Tony had got to within twenty yards before Peter looked at him. A little awkwardly Tony walked on.

"Hullo, Peter."

"Hullo, Tony."

There was a bench fixed to the trunk of the tree. They sat down on it. They looked upwards through the branches, speechless. Peter's feet knocked casually against the tree-trunk. Tony sat motionless. He dared not shift his glance from the sky. The terrible excitement of Peter's nearness petrified him. His eyes stared out the gaunt stars. Gradually Peter too became motionless. The tap of his shoes ceased. Tony became aware of a current flowing between Peter and himself. It grew, it tightened on him. For one exultant moment the whole spiritual force of Peter was turned upon him in a communication deeper than speech. The tides of both their beings had set inward. In the tiny space between them the tides of their selves met and mingled. . . . They had achieved an ethereal fusion. They had reached a consummation, an 'intangible soft flood of rapture.'

They had come through!

Remotely, it occurred to Tony that perhaps the fusion was not complete : that something more might be expected of him.

Differently, almost reluctantly, he stretched out his hand towards Peter's hand, and closed his fingers over it. Instantly Tony realised his mistake. The current was broken. The spiritual equilibrium was shattered. The ethereal consummation was ruined. By the mere touching of their hands Tony had degraded the moment from being the vehicle of a supreme sacrament to the occasion for a piece of common sentiment.

There was only one thing to do. He stood up, working his hand into the position of a handshake.

"*Au revoir*, Peter," he said.

Peter laughed quietly. He said : "Good-bye."

XII

MERRIE ENGLANDE

IT must be immense fun being allowed to blow the horn whenever one feels so inclined. Perhaps the chief consideration that had prompted Sir Francis Roretton to accept Mastership of the Hounds was the thought that he would now have an opportunity to emulate the third Squire Roretton, whose achievements ranked with those of the greatest of amateur huntsmen. Unfortunately, the family talent had not been inherited ; and the seventh squire proved signally incapable of killing his foxes. Nevertheless, Tony was curiously proud of his father's being an M.F.H.

As the poultry of the tenants diminished, the popularity of the Master dwindled. In vain did Lady Roretton go round the cottages :

" You've lost five hens, have you, Mrs. Borrey ? Well, I never heard of such a thing. What a shame. Still, you mustn't grumble *too* much, Mrs. Borrey ; I've lost fifty-three, and all I get is laughter thrown at me." And Lady Roretton would then break into ripples of mirth at the incredibly funny idea of her losing fifty-three hens. In vain did Sir Francis Roretton ride round the farms with promises of 'compensation at the end of the quarter.'

The people were definitely dissatisfied. And when Beckitt of the home farm failed one morning to touch his hat to squire, something – and something tactful – had to be done at once.

It was Lady Roretton that conceived the idea of having

a servants' dance. For the purposes of this, Mrs. Midwell, the cook, was brought into the drawing-room and received into the family confidence.

"We want you, Mrs. Midwell," explained the squire, "to give a little dance in the servants' hall. The servants have had a good deal to do lately ; and they deserve a little fun. I'm going to ask you to issue the invitations ; and I will give you a little list of farmers and smallholders whom perhaps you would not mind asking as well."

Mrs. Midwell, who was standing with what coyness her rotundity permitted her at the far end of the room, nodded affably, and murmured approval and assent.

"We want everyone to enjoy themselves, Mrs. Midwell," continued the squire. "And, of course, plenty for them all to eat and drink."

"But not *too* much to drink," added Lady Roretton, with one of her less lady-like giggles, as Mrs. Midwell did her best to bustle out of the room.

The Night of Mirth arrived. Red and green festoons were hoisted ; Mr. Tony's gramophone was borrowed ; and a Chinese-lantern-*cum*-mistletoe was placed over the back door.

Dancing was to begin at eight o'clock, and the arrival of the squire and his party was scheduled for ten o'clock. About ten past ten, Lady Roretton sailed with studied dignity through the door of the servants' hall ; to a low scratching sound, the gramophone was stopped, and the first housemaid at the piano gave a one-fingered rendering of 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' which everyone, the servants from the bottom of a patriotic heart, and the outsiders from the bottom of a full stomach, sang lustily.

Lady Roretton smiled, and Sir Francis nodded appreciation ; Tony smirked. At approximately the same place at which it had been snatched off, the gramophone

was put on again. Sir Francis glanced round the room ; he could not see Beckitt anywhere. Lady Roretton dug her husband savagely in the ribs.

"There's Mrs. Borrey, Frank," she whispered. "Five pullets. Go and dance with her." Sir Francis made a lunge in Mrs. Borrey's direction, and hesitated. He could waltz and polka with the best of them ; for a farmer's wife he would even consent to lancer. But this Maxina . . .

Still . . . five pullets.

He advanced gallantly. "Will Mrs. Borrey give me the pleasure . . . ?" he murmured.

"Cer'nly I will," said Mrs. Borrey pertly.

And the next moment he found his left hand absorbed into a pad of lobsterish flesh and Mrs. Borrey's ample head reposing against the silk lapel of his dinner-jacket. What was the woman at ? He glanced round in concern, to see if anyone was laughing at him. He observed that all the couples were dancing in this way. And then he found Mrs. Borrey's head raised suddenly and her face thrust into his.

"Steady on now," she said firmly. "Them's me new shoes, ye know, sir."

Sir Francis was too taken aback to speak ; he gaffed Mrs. Borrey by the shoulder and landed her without more ado at her ladyship's side.

"Well," enquired Lady Roretton in her most ingratiating tone, "how did you two get on ?"

"Oh ! 'e do 'op luvly," replied Mrs. Borrey ecstatically, "but" — this in a whisper, ruefully rubbing her ankle — "don't you find 'is feet *eenormous*, ma'am ?"

The butler, who was to be observed for some five minutes adjusting his tie in the mirror, at last collected sufficient courage to ask her ladyship for the favour of a dance. To Sir Francis's relief, he was left alone with Tony.

All of a sudden, a subdued scuffling sound was heard outside the door ; voices were raised, feet were stamped.

" Go and see who it is, will you, Tony ? " said his father. Tony left the hall, closing the door behind him, and found a bout of oaths proceeding in the back doorway.

A cordon consisting of Henry the under-footman and Tom the groom was endeavouring to bar the entrance of the more than ordinarily ' well-oiled ' Beckitt.

" 'Ere, you lads," Beckitt was burbling, " if I wants to come in, I comes in, I does. And there's me hinvitation card," he added, brandishing a back page of the local evening paper in their faces.

" Now, now, Mr. Beckitt," said Tyler soothingly, " you know you mustn't talk like that ! What'd squire say if he heard you now, eh ? "

" Squire ? " said Beckitt suspiciously. "'Oo's squire, eh ? 'Im as is too thoughtful to kill them sodden foxes. They be'ant too thoughtful not to take my fowls, they be'ant."

" Maybe he don't kill many foxes, Mr. Beckitt," rejoined Henry, in honest jealousy for his master's pride, " but he be rare good on the horn."

This was too much for Beckitt, who dealt Henry a terrific blow in the stomach, and, with a snort of rage, made for the door of the servants' hall, where Tony wisely allowed him to pass. The first person who confronted Beckitt after his hurricane entry was Sir Francis himself ; at the sight of whom Beckitt dissolved into a mass of buxom and beery mirth.

" Look you now, Francis Roretton," he gurgled. "'Ow be you and yer tame foxes ? Doin' nicely on my fowls, by the looks of yer ? "

The whole servants' hall was in stasis. Lewis, the butler, dropped Lady Roretton in the middle of the room

and ran towards the doorway. Sir Francis was at his best in the unpleasant situation. " This man is offensively drunk, Lewis," he said. " Will you see that he is put outside ? "

But as four pairs of hands urged the now deliciously happy Beckitt to the door, he shouted over his shoulder, " Oi be'ant agoin', oi be'ant. Oi'll come back once, oi will, and twice, till oi gets what oi want ; same's them kept vixens of yours, squire."

And Farmer Beckitt was bundled bellowing through the back door, whither Tony repaired for a second to bid him a sympathetic, if indiscreet, " Good night."

XIII

AUTHORITY

EVERY day of these Christmas holidays began and ended with a glance at the photograph of Peter. And it was with undiminished enthusiasm and excitement that Tony walked up the road from the station to Towers Hill for his third Easter term. Malone had already arrived, and together they set out to scour the grounds. It was with the old amazement that they walked round the end of the Avenue hedge and nearly knocked Peter over. The old jokes at Malone's expense were recalled ; and the old robust laughter went echoing round the Quad. It was good to be back again — very good.

Soon the light began to fail less early after call-over ; 'lockers' became gradually later ; and Malone began imperceptibly to grow nearer to Sladen ; it was as though the spring was entering into his bones without him knowing it. Tony's anxiety changed from wondering whether Peter liked him at all, to wondering whether his affection for Peter was not diminishing. That, he told himself, must never be allowed. Instinct had intimated to him a year ago that Peter was his one Predestined Friend. That fondness for him must never be allowed to waver ; it was immaterial now whether Peter reciprocated that fondness.

The truth was, that at this time more transient moods than there are winds in the sky possessed Tony's mind for a season. Rapture and melancholy, hope and despair, hedonism and asceticism, enthusiasm and apathy, coursed

violently through him, rending or drugging him as they hurried on their way. In the face of this legion of devils it was difficult for him to keep the ideal of the One perfect friend before him. When rapture or hope or hedonism or enthusiasm were in control the vision was easily tenable ; but when melancholy and despair prevailed, a measure of self-deception was necessary to continue in the belief that Peter was the only thing that mattered.

Whatever happened, he must hold on till camp. He remembered those nights on the Yorkshire moors and Ronny Banton's definition of Supreme Bliss. One night with Peter such as one of those and the memory would carry him on through a drab year of House prefectship. At all costs he must keep the ideal before him till August. But at the same time it was now necessary to make some concession to Public Opinion.

And so it was with some apprehension that Tony found he had lost his diary of last year ; that book in which he had written every detail of those evenings by the mere and those afternoons in the fog and rain ; that book of which every page was sprinkled with the single initial P ; that book with the help of which he could live again all those swift, exciting moments ; and whereby, when he was old and wise, he could encounter those young delightful figures round some forgotten corner of the mind.

The day that had been arranged for the inevitable March field-day opened in fog. Major Winnington conferred with the adjutant ; and the adjutant conferred with the sergeant-major, and the sergeant-major was despatched to confer with the Headmaster. As the Headmaster had sanctioned the proposal of several masters to go and play golf that day at the nearest coast course, he opined that the field-day must be held, come what might.

The corps as a whole were for the adjournment of the manoeuvres. But, in a short speech from the steps of the armoury, Major Winnington reminded them that the War had been fought in worse things than fog, and exhorted them to "put some 'guts' into it." After which the corps smiled quietly to itself; sloped arms; and marched off.

The 'scheme' of the average field-day could generally be worked out just as well on the parade ground or the Round. The entire morning was spent in entraining, detraining, and marching into position. The early afternoon was used for the purposes of consuming over-salted pork pies and extending one's section to five paces. The half-hour between 3.30 and 4 saw the advent of the action (timed to begin at 14.37 hours punct. Battalion Orders.)

The action was used by the rank and file for the purposes of letting off as many blanks as possible; or alternatively for letting off no blanks at all and merely rattling the bolt. (The latter alternative possessing the double advantage that one could barter one's blanks to an enthusiast; and also that one did not have to clean one's rifle after the Cease Fire.)

On this particular day, the fog, which had looked like clearing off at about noon, came on thicker than ever at three. Harassed platoon commanders and important subalterns trotted about in the tense atmosphere exhorting stray section commanders to keep their contact. It was useless.

Someone in Tony's section let off a blank inadvertently and to the serious danger of the section commander. Immediately the sections in support on either side opened fire. Within ten minutes the entire ammunition of the white force, whose flanks had curved round so as to form an almost complete circle, was shot away.

Ten minutes afterwards the enemy attacked. Gallant section commanders made appropriate remarks to their sections and felt for their bayonets; only to remember that the cautious Major Winnington had caused them to be dispensed with for the purposes of field operations.

The section commander ran; Tony ran; everybody ran. A tired Very light went up, without enthusiasm. Officers shouted; everybody went on running. Tony ran straight into the adjutant, who was bidding an earnest, if incompetent, bugler to sound the Cease Fire.

When at last the bugler had wrung out the distorted notes, a tremendous bout of firing broke out everywhere. The enthusiasts were enjoying themselves with all their superfluous blanks.

Platoons and companies began to consolidate. Jennings's platoon was wonderfully intact. Everyone was present except Malone. The platoon marched off in the supposed direction of the station, delivering itself, as it went, of the old-fashioned melodies of 'John Brown's Body' and 'What shall we do with a drunken Winners?' At the station they found the whole of the rest of the battalion waiting for them. Tony looked round for Peter. He could not see more than ten yards; but the Towers Hall platoon was immediately on their left. There he was, talking to somebody with a white hat-band - a prisoner, Tony supposed. At that moment the prisoner in question turned, and, seeing Captain Dickson, the White C.O., talking to Sykes, went up and saluted.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said, "that I got captured."

"All right, Malone," Tony heard Dickson say. "Fall in with your own platoon now."

And Tony understood.

That evening after they arrived home, Fleming came and told Tony that Sykes wanted to see him in Captain's study.

Sykes was standing up when Tony walked in. In his hand he held a little red diary ; and his finger was between two of the pages.

It was two terms since Tony had last known Sykes.

"I'm afraid," said Sykes, "that in order to identify this diary I had to look at one of the pages. It was picked up this morning in the passage. I do not know," he went on, "but I should say that it is almost certainly yours, Roretton."

Without a word Tony took the diary from Sykes ; without a word, and keeping his fingers in the page, he walked out of the study. Once outside the door, he looked at the leaf which Sykes must have read. It was the last entry in the book : 'Sunday, December 13th. Met P. on the Round at dusk. He was looking superb. (S.B. to talk, alone, at night.) Nirvana. What a marvellous end to the term ! Rolling along — singing a song.'

Tony sighed.

That evening in 'mousers' he did not try to do any work. Sitting in his study with his blind up, and looking out on to the wet roofs of the houses opposite, he wondered what Sykes must have thought. He felt vaguely angry with Malone for allowing himself to be captured that day. And yet . . . things were tending in the direction which he had for so long wanted. Still, his time would come again.

"Until Caesar pitches camp, lieutenant."

After the serious business of the summer term was over, after Peter had discovered that Malone's character was chronically childish, Tony would come into his own. For the present — It was bound to hurt a little.

Tony wished he could give expression to his tangled feelings. Surely, he thought, Rupert Brooke could never have had a poignant trouble ; so well was he able to give utterance to his every grief.

Tony took up his pencil.

The last line of a sonnet had come to him.

'You will remember then, remember me,' he scribbled down.

Yes, it had possibilities ; but, as it stood, it somehow did not look quite right. How to put the last line but one ?

*When beauty fades, and sadness lulls the sea,
You will remember me, remember me.*

That was better : 'me' instead of 'then' was good. The repetition of 'me' was good. Altogether a good ending, thought Tony.

Gradually the frame of the first part of the sonnet came to him. Clearly the first half must consist of : 'Now . . . you forget.' The second half would be : 'Then . . . you will remember.' Working on this scheme, it all seemed to come easier. In half an hour's time Tony was reading over to himself the most sincere poem he had as yet written. He found 'Thous' more effective somehow than 'Yous.' — Yes, much more effective. They gave the whole a more Elizabethan effect. He read it aloud.

*When laughter fills thy world, and earth is green,
And unknown melodies swell, and life is fair,
When thou hast sipped the wine and found it rare,
And that which is excelleth what hath been ;
When golden whispers charm ; and sweetly yet
The springs of gladness in thy bosom rise,
And passing passions linger in thy eyes,
And laughter crowns thy lips ; thou dost forget.
But when night falls and all thy skies are grey,
And in the west, the wind brings up the rain ;
When memories wound, and all thy thoughts are pain,
And the red wine of love is shed away.*

*When beauty fades, and sadness lulls the sea,
Thou shalt remember me, remember me.*

"Lovely, isn't it?" said Tony, half aloud.

It was with some anxiety that Tony looked forward to the summer term. He must get his XI colours if possible. If only because of Peter he must get his colours. Sir Francis took an optimistic view of his son's prospects.

"Oh, they'll put you in all right, Tony. They know you're keen on the game. That's always half the battle."

But Tony knew that it was usually those people who 'walked' into the side to whom a First XI hat-band was of considerably less value than a stall in row Q of the London Pavilion, while those to whom cricket was a creed and an obsession were often to be found struggling for the last place in their House team.

"It's a fine game," Sir Francis continued. "Builds character. There used to be a poem about it in my day. Something about—

"It's not for the sake of a ribboned coat."

"Ah," said Tony, "but all too often it *is* for the sake of a ribboned coat."

He remembered it all so well from last year: Those dreaded fielding practices spent partly in dropping, through sheer nerves, the simplest of catches, and partly in praying that whatever gods may be will cause the other candidates to drop one catch more. Those opening matches, when one was either playing oneself and therefore either sitting in the pavilion with one's blazer round one's shoulders, waiting to go in; or returning slowly from the wicket, pulling off one's ridiculous gloves;

or standing at extra cover and praying that the next ball would not produce one of those high, easy-looking catches that spun so viciously in one's hands; or else (if one had been dropped from the side) one was sitting amongst the spectators, sick at heart and disconsolate, and willing with all one's might that the rival candidate, now playing immaculate cricket out there in the middle, would play the most atrocious cowshot at the next one and be bowled.

*And still youth fights his battles,
And strains, and tries his all.
And through his brain there rattles
The lilt of bat and ball.*

*Youth struggling at the wicket,
Youth fumbling at the goal.
The hopes and fears of cricket
Leave bruises on his soul.*

All the holidays Tony had gone assiduously to the nets on the nearest county ground; and gradually he had learnt to keep his left shoulder well in front and to hit the half volley as "W. G., my boy, would have hit it." The holidays had not been eventful. The only event really had been the arrival of a letter from Canns. Poor Canns; he had always been unlucky, and now Merrivale had returned him a desperately sincere letter, unread. It amazed Tony, this prolonged devotion on Canning's part to someone to whom he had only once spoken. It amazed him — even though he understood it.

Tony was picked for the first match — a good omen, he thought — and he made a rather pleasing 27. Safe for two more matches, surely. There was now hardly time to think of Peter. However, a couple of blobs followed. Well, even if Tony did get turned out of the side, there

was always Peter to fall back upon. But Tony remembered the way Sir Francis had said : " Of course, we know you'll get 'em all right."

They brought him back into the side for the Foresters' match, the preparation game for *the* inter-school match. The school were led by 70 in the first innings. Finally, the Foresters left them with 214 to make ; not entirely simple for a fourth innings. But, then, the school had a strong batting side.

Still, six good wickets were down for 95. And, as Tony walked out across the endless acres of the Round, he offered up a little profane prayer that he would get a full pitch to leg next ball. There was one ball to come. It was a full pitch ; but to the off and high. Tony did not get hold of it, and it went gently off the splice to extra cover.

" One," he called.

At the other end a man in an I. Z. cap was bowling leg breaks. Tony never knew how he survived that first over. He could not play a single ball properly. First he flicked wildly at a ball going away from his off stump. Metcalfe, batting at the other end, shook his head meaningly. Next, Tony played back to a turning half-volley and was all but bowled. And lastly he hit a good length ball outside his legs, all against the break, over mid-wicket's. Mid-wicket, a military-looking non-bender in a faded Forester sweater, turned with unnatural agility and ran back.

" Run it," called Metcalfe.

Tony ran haltingly, and more towards the pavilion than the wicket. The fielder's hands closed over the ball. Tony stopped and looked back ; and, with an involuntary grunt, mid-wicket tripped and fell ponderously upon his venerable stomach. Tony was wracked by an internal mirth. The ball lay three feet out of harm's way ;

and while mid-wicket was collecting himself and gathering the ball, they ran a second.

The next ball that Tony had from the medium righthander, he cut like a knife to the boundary. After that Tony drove and cut in the way he had done in those nets on the county ground ; and there are few better sensations than the feel of the ball hit ' plumb off the meat ' to beat extra cover for sheer pace along the ground. The groups of figures by the school wall were applauding even the singles. Tony caught the atmosphere. All those tedious hours among the lookers-on were made up for by these quick, exultant minutes. For the moment he was in possession of the school : 180 for seven, 181 for eight, 196 for nine, and Tony still in. The leg-breaker was brought on again. Tony stepped out and caught his first ball on the full toss. The ball rebounded off the chapel. The next one he let go. The third he placed carefully past mid-on for a two. The fourth he cut to the left of cover and ran. Tony called his partner for a second, and they went for it. But cover was young and supple, and his cap had not yet begun to fade ; and he threw the wicket down with Tony two yards out.

Two hundred and three all out ; and of these Tony had made an invaluable 43. They were clapping him from the wicket. Tony wondered whether he ought to touch his cap. Or would that look *blasé*? Self-consciously he took it off altogether. He ran up the steps. It was difficult to repress a smile of pleasure as Henderson met him at the top.

Only one moment is more pleasurable than that when one hears one has been given one's First XI colours, and that moment is when for the first time one puts on one's First XI cap.

That evening Tony wrote home.

The next day Tony went out to tea with Mr. Kitson.

" You're really *very* pleased to have got your colours, I hope ? "

" Yes, very, sir."

" Good. I'm glad. I was almost afraid that you might not be." Kitson smiled enigmatically.

They talked about school politics : about masters.

" Is it true that Mr. Laing is engaged to be married, sir ? "

" I believe so. Funny, isn't it ? "

Tony laughed.

" It'll be your turn next," he said lightly.

Kitson did not smile.

" No," he said gravely. " Somehow I think not."

" Oh, really, sir ? "

Kitson smiled a little sadly.

" The futility of marriage is obsessing me at the moment," he said, " especially for schoolmasters."

" But why, sir ? "

" I'm not sure that a schoolmaster should marry. At least, I think it's hardly fair on his wife."

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

" Well," said Kitson, " I withdraw that as being a general rule. But for my own case - it is so."

" But I could never go through life alone," Tony said.

" No. And I could never go through life with the same person."

" Oh. . . . But then you could have children," Tony added cheerfully.

" And I could repeat all my schoolmaster's faults in them."

" And *all* your virtues ! "

Tony could see that the man was taking a large delight in this discussion of himself.

" Yes, and *all* my virtues . . ." said Kitson in an absurd voice.

" But isn't there anyone you would like to marry ? "

Tony persisted.

" Yes. There is."

" Oh. . . . Oh."

" Someone you know, at any rate by sight."

" Oh ! It must be a House matron." Tony laughed.

" No." Kitson smiled his Puckish, fugitive smile.

" No ; curiously exasperating though it may appear, it is not a House matron."

The serious cricket ended. The term drew to a close. And when Tony had done with having ' wind up ' for school matches, and had finished teaching the promising young cricketers in his House to play back or to bowl the off-break, he came face to face again with the Idea of Peter. The old passion for service, the old longing to worship, the old desire for some slight return, came flooding back. Cricket was all very well. But cricket made one successful, not happy. Cricket was a means ; not an end. Although it *had* been exciting to be shaken by the hand by Peter after the Forester's match.

And, as Tony sat in his study on the evening before camp, there came back to him a vision of white tents upon a purple moorland, and the sun shining, and the moon conniving, and the gay stars nodding and beckoning out there in the night.

" Until Caesar pitches camp, lieutenant."

Tony opened the gramophone. He had found a new motif for Peter. *Liebesträume*. He put it on. The charming theme was more symbolic than ever to-night. It was pregnant with destiny. The fine opening : - the March evening. The theme nearly lost in the material tumult of the bass : - cricket, cricket, cricket. The quiet, inevitable assurance of the ending. Tony understood. It was coming, his hour. Even now it was coming. Those

three solitary, lingering notes : the night and the heather and the friend. ('And was there heather in the south country ? And was there heather in the south ?')

Once more Tony played it through.

The art of Backhaus brought him by turns rapture and tranquillity, excitement, riot, and calm. And, as the last note died away, suddenly the sun set.

Tony closed the gramophone.

"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow."

XIV

CLOUD-PEDESTALS

BUT To-morrow is often disappointing in her new rôle of To-day.

It was raining when Tony woke up. The window-sill had water standing on it. The rain had driven in and made dull the brass buttons of his uniform, which, from sheer unwonted happiness, he had polished the evening before. He looked out of the window. But the great arc of greyness was unbroken. Now, of course, it would rain for ever.

The rain streamed down their capes as they marched down to the station ; it dribbled from the relaxed ends of Captain Welling's moustache ; it trickled down the seams in Major Winnington's sallow face. It pattered and hissed against the train windows. And when they drew in at the station, after travelling over a hundred miles to escape, it was raining still.

There is no sound so hideous or so productive of insanity as the perpetual, inevitable patter of rain falling perpendicularly on the canvas of a tent.

All that first evening the great flakes of dust and the smattering pellets of rain fell ceaselessly. Tony sought out Peter and asked him to come to the canteen. Silently Peter went with him. Together they sat at the edge of the N.A.A.F.I. tent, drinking insipid ginger-beer and watching the sky become uniformly black and the lights flicker up in the deserted lines. . . . It was not a restful silence ; it was not even a quiet silence. Tony could not,

and Peter would not, think of something to say. Of course, it was the rain. The rain had damped everything — everything.

" Damn this rain ! " said Tony, with fierce abruptness.

" Yes," said Peter after a pause. " Shall we go ? "

" Yes," said Tony, and felt immediately foolish. They went to their own tents. Tony's tent was just in front of Peter's. Weary and unsatisfied, he pulled off his jacket and sweater. Pyjamas be damned ! He would sleep in his flannels to-night. It was all the rain's fault.

Suddenly he heard a loud concerted yell. " Bingham ! Bingham ! " A stampede of human beings, in various states of undress, rushed past his tent. He put his cap out. " What's happening ? " he enquired of an entirely strange person in Kipp's.

" They're having Bingham's tent down," came the answer.

" Why ? " asked Tony.

" Oh ! for general damnableness, I suppose," said the other, dashing off into the *mélée*. (It was the rain's fault.) Two officers were coming up from their own lines. The mob scattered and drew off to a distance of twenty yards or so. One figure alone was left kneeling by the last remaining peg of the tent. A heave, and the guy-rope was broken. The tent-pole jerked itself to the ground. The kneeling figure rose and ran as the two officers bore down upon him. By the glimmer of an uprooted tent light, Tony made out the flamboyant features of Merrivale.

Like ferreted rabbits, the former tenants crawled out of the débris of their tent. All the occupants had been inside. All, that is, but Bingham. Bingham had been safely installed in a latrine for at least half an hour. He knew the penalty for taking a firm line about smoking on Coney.

Relays of officers appeared. Lights out sounded. And

Tony smoked a compensatingly good Turkish cigarette and went to sleep.

In the morning the rain had stopped. But the space in between the tents was vile and boggy. It was a loathsome, pig-headed business, this laying out of one's kit. The parades, too, were stern affairs. In the south country they evidently took their wars seriously. Still, there was always the evening to look forward to : but the bounds were strict. No moorland strolls this year. Well, at any rate there was Peter ; yes, but *quantum mutatus ab illo*. Tony remembered only the Peter of the winter term, reckless, robust, and deliciously crude. " When Cæsar pitches camp, lieutenant." He had forgotten that everyone is changed, in some degree, by camp. And he was certainly not prepared for this new, sobered, almost elderly Peter ; this Peter that had an eye for the good name of the school, and wished that he had gone to Winchester instead of Towers Hill. This Peter that allowed a cold to make him become silent and go about in an overcoat. This Peter that gradually failed to disguise his irritation at Tony's eternal readiness to attend and serve.

The days passed, and the 'Section in defence' developed into the 'Company in attack,' and still Peter refused to come anywhere or do anything.

Three nights only remained, and Tony summoned his confidence. He thought of the old definition of Supreme Bliss. He went up to Peter as he came off parade.

" Will you come for a stroll with me to-night ? " he asked as casually as he could. " We might go and look at the show from the hill."

Peter hesitated. Instantly Tony was plunged into the depths of gloom.

" Not to-night. To-morrow night," Peter said at last, as he began to walk away.

And immediately Tony's heart fluttered to the heights. He would go out by himself to-night to learn the ropes. Canning was sitting undressing in the tent when he got there. Canning !

" Will you come and see the show to-night, Canns ? " Tony asked suddenly.

" Well, I've been twice," said Canning, " but I don't mind coming again."

That night at about a quarter to eleven Tony and Canning crept out of their tent together and made for the corner of the N.A.A.F.I. tent. They were clear of their own lines now, and of their own officers ; there remained only the guard. The guard was standing at ease outside the guard tent when they crawled into sight of him. They waited for him to pass. He was wearing spectacles. Excellent. He about turned, and, as he marched by for the second time, they crawled out with the guard tent on their left and made for the shelter of the alder bushes. Free, free again, thought Tony ; but somehow this was not quite as good as that night with Ronny Banton a year ago.

As they walked together up the hill, the first of the great searchlights pirouetted into the sky. The light glanced high upon the ridge above them. They fell on their stomachs. They had almost forgotten that they could be seen from the camp in those powerful rays. Once into the wood it was safer. Up the hill they climbed, winding in and out of the newly planted firs. Up and up till the small firs blended with the more elderly cedars and with the venerable pines. At last they reached the clearing from which they could see all the country to the south-west stretched out like a map before them. And here, at the mossy foot of an aged cedar, they sat down, and looked upwards and outwards into the night. They gazed at the secret sky, carpeted with summer stars and cushioned with autumnal mists, and slashed every now and then by

vandal beams of mortal light. They drank the clean, positive air of the August night ; and found their hands moist with the timid dew. And all around them lay weird and subtle patterns of tinselled light, small iridescent bubbles of rainbow fire, the secret toil of a myriad tiny spiders. And between them, as it seemed, and the sky, hung the empyreal canopy of silence. And, responding to the law that they felt clinging about them, Tony repressed an urge to say : " How marvellous ! " And neither of them spoke a word.

Then it began. A huge tract of ground, about a mile and a half away, burst suddenly into brilliance. The sound of distant bugles swept over the valley to the hill ; and in the sheet of light they saw what seemed to be a great scarlet engine moving forward inevitably across the grass. Then the massed bands burst into music ; and the giant column halted. As if by some invisible mechanism, this block of scarlet wheeled and turned. And the glitter of drums and trumpets scarred the fields of the valley with streaks of crackling light. And ever from the field afar came old familiar tunes and challenging, military marches with all the mellow beauty of great power modified by distance.

For an hour Tony and Canning sat together, speechless. At last Tony looked away from the field and glanced at Canns. But Canns was unaware of it. Tony could see his eyes in the glare of the searchlights. He was lost in the riot of colour and tune. And Tony, perhaps for the first time in his life, was consciously proud of being an Englishman.

While so many hundreds of people lay sleeping in the darkened tents there below, high up amid the fluttering of the gargantuan torches Tony and Canns watched on. The finale came. The spattering of machine-guns yielded to the double thud of howitzers. And the boom

of innumerable guns echoed violently round the wooded hills. And flashes blazed, quicker now and fiercer ; and pillars of fire stood up from earth to sky ; and tumult of distant voices came curling from the misty flame ; and a huge column of fire leapt suddenly higher than any other, and tossed its arrogant sparks to the bewildered stars.

It was like some weird dream of Wagner. And Tony almost expected to see the heavens open and the three Norns sitting upon a cloud of fire, holding the strings of marionette howitzers and generals.

But it was not so ; it was only that Badajoz had fallen. And, as suddenly as it had appeared, the light vanished and the noise was hushed.

And from very far away, from behind an unaccountable mist, Tony heard the sudden silence again broken. The massed bands were playing 'Abide with Me.' From somewhere behind Canns and himself in the wood a single band took up the second verse. Very eerie and ghostly it sounded, this hymn to Jesus among these pagan oaks and firs. And as the last verse replied faintly from the dimly lighted field beyond the valley, Tony sang quietly :

"Hold thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes. . . ."

And somehow, even though Canning was with him, and silent still, Tony did not feel in the least foolish.

The next morning Tony woke up with an obscure conviction that life was bad. It ought to be good ; but it wasn't. Camp had been a failure. He had expected to go everywhere and do everything with Peter. As it was, he had done nothing, except for sitting about on the lines of kitbags looking at Peter's tent and sighing a little. Even if Peter did come to-night (and he felt sure that he would),

it would only partly make up for this waste of potential joy. As it was, life was not good - not at all good.

There was the usual battalion field-day that morning ; and, immediately parade was dismissed, Tony made for Peter.

" You are coming, aren't you ? " he said.

" Where ? " asked Peter.

" To-night," said Tony.

" Well, if you don't mind, Tony," Peter answered, " I don't think I will, if you don't mind. I've got the hell of a cold ; and really it's not very safe. I'm frightfully sorry," he added. Tony gaped. Peter refusing because it was not safe !

" Oh ! but it's perfectly safe really," he said. " Won't you come ?

" No," said Peter testily.

" But why not ? " pursued Tony tiresomely.

" Because it's not safe," said Peter.

" Oh ! but surely . . ." Tony began again.

" Well, if you must know," Peter broke in, " I'll tell you." He paused. " The reason is," he said, " that I'm sick to death of the pathetic way you always look at me ; and I'm damned if I want to see you again."

" At any rate," he went on, " not till you brace up a bit. Do for God's sake *try* and be a little hearty. Stop all this thinking and reading for a bit. Tell a few stories. And, above all, don't *look* at me like that."

And Sladen turned and walked towards the N.A.A.F.I. tent. And, because silence was impossible, Tony muttered incomprehensibly to himself as he stumbled into his own tent.

" I'm damned. I'm damned if I want to see you. I'm damned if I want to see you again."

Only one thing mattered now. Only one thing would ever matter. To keep out of sight of Sladen. To keep

out of sight. To keep out of sight of Sladen. To keep out. "Come and be meaningless," Sladen had virtually said to him. "Come and learn to take nothing seriously. Come and fool life away." O God ! What a fool he had been, trying to achieve an intimacy with someone in whom there was nothing with which to achieve intimacy.

To keep out of sight of Sladen. To keep out of sight. Only to keep out.

"I'm damned if I want to see you again."

To the outside world that casual sentence of Sladen's meant nothing. But to Tony it meant that the person for whom he had lived, the only person who created in him a wish to go on living, had turned and stamped on him. And when the one thing of which a person thinks as he wakes up at morning, of which he dreams as he falls asleep at night, the one thing which colours his every thought and moulds his every action, the one thing which matters, the thing, in a word, which is his creed and his duty and his life, when that thing is wrenched violently and unexpectedly from the pattern of his existence, the resulting gap is apt to take a certain time to fill.

To keep out of sight of Sladen. To keep out of sight. To keep out of sight of Sladen. To keep out.

*Bid farewell to all that most thou lovest,
Tell thy heart thy living life is done.*

And when, kitbag on shoulder, he stole away on the last morning just as dawn was breaking, he offered up a silent thanksgiving that for two days he had not set eyes on Sladen, and resolved that, come what might, the worship that had for two years controlled his life should instantly be trampled out.

He would go into seclusion - not in the crude, physical way, not into a cottage in the mountains, but into the

recesses of himself. He would become self-sufficient, *αὐτάρχης*; utterly independent on any human being ; *μοσανθρώπος* almost, but without the implied bitterness. He would retreat into himself and circumscribe himself round ; never reveal his least emotion again. Furthermore, he would recover his centre, and be invulnerable. It was only when one had changed one's centre and when one lived in some other person that one was vulnerable - when one was hurt and glad according to the caprice of, not one's own, but of some other person's moods. Now he would possess his soul again. Finally, he would never have any more emotions - not even concealed ones. He would only allow himself thoughts. There must be no Achilles heel.

XV

PARIS

I

IT was good to be home again. Tony could feel it. And that, for him, was a novel sensation. It was comfortable to be received with due deference by Lewis at the door. It was pleasing to lie in bed in the morning and have one's clothes immaculately put out on a chair by a valet. It was good to have one's letters brought in with one's morning tea. But it was best of all to get a letter with an exciting French stamp the very first morning after he got home.

It was from Reni Maulois, as it turned out - an invitation to go and stay with him in Paris *immédiatement*.

Tony ran downstairs to his mother's room in order to deal in detail with any possible opposition to the scheme.

Her ladyship acquiesced somewhat nervously ; and the idea was first publicly mooted at the breakfast-table. Sir Francis seemed more or less agreeable - although he failed at first to comprehend why anyone who had the whole of Burnans Park in which to ride and walk could possibly want to go to Paris.

2

A week later Tony was standing on the platform of Victoria Station, waiting for the boat train to come in. Tony was somewhat awed by the calmness with which

most of his fellow-passengers breasted the human tide at Newhaven, and by the boredom with which they eyed the obedient sea. He was perhaps a little surprised to observe that French earth was much the same colour as the English variety. But he noted with satisfaction that the trains were altogether different, and that one really had to speak the schoolroom words which he had learnt at Meston to the ticket-collector.

During the whole of the three hours' journey Tony kept his eyes fixed on the countryside . . . IMPRESSIONS ! He felt it essential to collect impressions. They might interest Reni at dinner that night ; and they would astound the good people of Burnans. But impressions were not easy this evening. Certainly the colours of the countryside appeared more definite ; and there was more variety in the designs of the cottages. It was a pity that they did not stop at Rouen.

Tony felt a little depressed as the train drew up at the Gare St. Lazare. A big city at night can be very terrifying. And Tony hoped sincerely that he would be able to remember the address of Reni's house. The porter who seized his suit-case appeared comparatively tame. He neither chattered, shrugged his shoulders, nor looked murderous. When, however, Tony presented him with five francs, he began to gibber his dissatisfaction in a way that quite satisfied Tony of his nationality.

Oh ! yes, he was in France now.

And, without waiting for the outraged porter to finish his complaint, Tony jumped into the taxi. It was a very comfortable taxi, certainly ; but Tony wished sincerely that it would start. The dear porter was becoming menacing. Then he remembered : he had not given the address. The taximan turned and muttered some incomprehensible phrase. Tony gaped.

"Ou allez vous ?" said the other severely.

"Quarante cinq, Avenue Malakoff," said Tony with some difficulty.

And the taxi dashed ferociously out of the station yard, and out into the dazzle of a myriad bewildering lights. The very streets seemed studded with a litter of coloured globes. And down tight-thronged streets and round precarious corners the taxi flashed exuberantly. For all Tony knew, this Jehu was whirling him to the very brink of the Pit. Once, when a little ape-like gendarme rushed hysterically, out from a lurking-place at a street-corner, his taxi struck a 'bus smartly upon the number-plate. It did not matter.

At last the taxi appeared to come to a more permanent standstill. Tony peered out, and saw an enormous door in an otherwise bare wall. The door was of stout opaque glass, encased by a framework of iron bars. A prison?

In some consternation Tony got out of the taxi. He was evidently going to have to spend the night on the streets of an unknown foreign city. With a conscious effort to rid his mind of that picture of the apache, he stood staring up a little mournfully at the unpromising façade. Not a flicker of light; not a sign of life. Pitiably, he turned for possible assistance to the taximan. But the taximan was sitting reading the evening paper. Slowly he walked back to his luggage. With a look of utter contempt, the taximan bestirred himself. He descended from the taxi, went towards the door, and pressed a bell in the wall, which Tony, in his panic, had overlooked.

Immediately a light showed through the glass. Tony waited an instant before tipping the driver; but nobody appeared to be coming to answer the door. With a certain brusque compassion the taximan put his hand on one of the cross-bars. Immediately the door swung open. The fare had been four francs. Utterly bewildered, Tony

gave the man a ten-franc note and walked hurriedly into the hall.

Still nobody to be seen!

This was like forcing an entry into a haunted house.

Then through the glass of a lobby on the right Tony beheld an aged woman making as if to come towards him; in the door of the lobby she paused, apparently waiting for him to speak. He had evidently *got* to say something. Embarrassing; but true.

"J'ai arrivé," he groaned at last. "No. I mean, Je suis arrivé."

The concierge nodded graciously.

"Pour Monsieur Maulois, monsieur? Là-bas, monsieur, là-bas."

And the concierge retired, leaving Tony to make his way towards a door under the staircase which occupied the entire left half of the hall. As he walked closer to it, the door opened. It was Reni himself!

"Ah, my dear Tony," he exclaimed, holding out both hands to him. "Je suis ravi de vous voir."

Instantly all Tony's embarrassment left him. He began spontaneously to admire the house. The long crimson curtains with their heavy ornamental rods. The coloured glass candlesticks and chandeliers. The medieval-looking portrait of that female ancestor.

They sat down to dinner. Tony tried to conceal his excitement at drinking real red wine; but he was unabashed in his praise of the cuisine in general, particularly of the separate vegetable course, which had been so artistically prepared.

After dinner they went into the drawing-room.

"What liquor will you take?" enquired Reni; and Tony wondered whether he had meant to say liqueur.

"Benedictine, kummel, crème de menthe . . . ?" Reni went on.

Tony plunged firmly.

" May I have Benedictine ? " he said, trying to catch the tone of the true connoisseur.

To his relief, Tony found that this thing called Benedictine could be drunk quite painlessly ; nay, that it even made one feel on tolerably good terms with oneself. And the world was none too bad a place when he subsided into the softness of his canopied bed.

The next morning the maid who brought him his cocoa and rolls, informed him that Monsieur Reni did not, as a rule, get up till noon. Whereupon Tony at once elected to do likewise. At about twelve, he got up and dressed and ventured out a little timidly into the Avenue Maikoff. Outside tiny restaurants, tables which took up most of the pavement space were covered with tankards of bock and half-bottles of cheap wine. Everywhere the Parisian workman was seated at *déjeuner*. Tony wandered down the street till he came to a kind of square ; the Place du Trocadero, he read. He crossed the square and passed beneath the colonnade of the museum. And, as he stood on the steps at the far side, Paris unfolded itself before his eyes.

A confused stream of men and cars was threading its way assiduously through and round the massy foundations of the Eiffel Tower. Beyond lay a vista of emerald grass and scarlet borders, slashed at regular intervals by paths of correct yellow, and punctuated here and there by some nymph or naiad trapped for an instant, and cast, for all eternity, in stone. A symbolic vision of life.

Reluctantly Tony turned and made his way back home. Was it only his imagination, or were people really staring at him as he passed ? It was rather upsetting. He would ask Reni.

At lunch Reni explained the phenomenon.

" It is, my dear Tony, because of your Herculean

stature. We French are what you English would call a stubby people. It is our lot to toddle through life, while you glide through it."

Tony laughed ; after all, he was not quite six foot. But after lunch, when he started out for the walk which Reni had mapped out for him, through the Grands Boulevards, he noticed it again, that depreciatory, almost hostile, stare. Here was a new, or perhaps an older, socialism.

Instead of : " Why should you have those extra three cars ? " here was : " Why should you have those extra eight inches ? "

Still, the French race might be meagre and grudging ; but the French capital was lavish enough. Tony enjoyed the grand extravagance of the Place de la Concorde, and the Boulevard des Capucines ; and the contrast of all this garden magnificence with the narrow cobbled side-streets, with their dingy pavement cafés and quaint coloured signs. The Bohemian blurring and blending with the Imperial.

That evening they dined early and went to a theatre. Reni thought that a musical comedy would probably be easiest for Tony to understand. Tony was immediately struck by the comparative shoddiness of the French theatre-building. He tried hard ; but the performance bored him. Quite early on, he lost the thread of the plot, and turned his attention to thinking what comments he should make in the interval. But it is difficult to be intelligent about a play of which one had hardly understood one word ; and entire ignorance of the language is apt to breed severe criticism of the acting. Certainly one actress had personality ; but she appeared to be using that possession chiefly for the benefit of a handsome dago with a black moustache, who then was using his somewhat unnecessary opera-glasses from the stage box.

Tony was glad to get out of the theatre again ; and he was not surprised to find that the time was ten to twelve. And now Reni had promised to take him to Montmartre . . . or was it Montparnasse ? It didn't really matter which it was to be. Except that Tony felt he ought to go to the Moulin Rouge. But Reni, who was busy keeping the car away from the tram-lines, informed him that the Moulin Rouge could hardly be considered French nowadays ; so they were going to La Rotonde. Vaguely Tony wondered whether there would be an apache at La Rotonde.

The car swung out of the dingy little street into a much larger one. Tony was amazed at the number of coloured signs. Over every house there seemed to be turning a green or a red light. And outside every café a group of assorted humanity stood, talking, or contemplating the neighbouring group. And besides the groups there were others – individuals. They did not talk ; they merely contemplated.

The car pulled up. Tony found that the place they had come to was one of the largest of these pavement cafés. Reni suggested staying in the open air ; and they sat down at a table in the row nearest the street.

"I don't believe," said Reni, "that there is anything so amusing as just looking at people."

And for a quarter of an hour they sat sipping some faint saffron liquid and speculating on the origin and nationality of the motley crowd around them. There were some palpably "doing Paris" – Americans. There were two solitary Englishmen – undergraduates, to judge by their looks and glances. And there were Frenchmen of all denominations. On the whole, there were few mixed tables – either all men or (much more rarely) all women. Outside the café precincts, which were carefully marked off by a tactful and excluding row of flowering

shrubs, the stream of humanity passed at greatly varying paces.

Tony gazed at them, and told himself incessantly that he was not shocked. He was just a citizen of the world. He was not in the sheltered garden of Towers Hill now. Life was no longer round the corner. It was in the middle of the road ; it laughed and beckoned to him from beyond the geraniums. A fortnight ago he had started life anew. Did it matter what became of him in this fearful city ? He had no name to dirty ; no past to let down. The future was anyone's. The present was exclusively his own.

And out there across the street, in the half-light of Le Dôme, Life was waiting for him. Two months, and he would be reading Vergil behind locked doors and sleeping beneath barred windows. Here and now nothing, not even self-respect, stood between him and life.

The moment passed ; and Tony became aware of the near presence of Reni and the remote existence of England. Life was there still ; yes, but what life ! "Nothing," Oscar Wilde had said, "succeeds like excess." These people evidently believed it. These women with their lips too scarlet, their eyebrows too black ; these men with their too perfect manners, and their waist-coats that fitted them too well. And that man above all over there in the corner, charming three of his brethren with his insipid smile and his willowy elegance – how evil he looked in his too immaculate black suit and with his too tired eyes.

"Mr. Jennings every time," said Tony half-aloud.

And at that moment the creature in question turned and caught Tony's curious glance ; and the half-smile that lay congealed upon his eyes reminded Tony of the cold eyes of a serpent,

Reni had invited people to practically every meal for the rest of the week – Americans and Germans and Russians – all more or less literary. And whereas it had been an unnatural exception to write at Burnans, here Tony found that it was an exception not to be engaged on some creative work. Accordingly, he quickly discovered that he was writing a novel.

And generally at these meals the conversation would be turned by Reni on to the characteristics of the English race.

"It would be indelicate of me," he would begin, "to say that the English were a race of hypocrites ; but that is, in fact, what I mean. Polite ? Oh, my dear Tony, your manners are perfect ; but artificial, unreal. You may be boiling with rage, but you remain superbly civil. . . . That is the whole object of English education, is it not ? To make people trample on their feelings ; to smother their tears or their pleasure or their anger. And so to exasperate Europe. For really, my dear Tony, there is little enough satisfaction in scolding or mocking or yet embracing a block of ice."

"Surely, though," Tony would reply, "that education does teach us to be the Masters of our Fate and the Captains of our Soul, doesn't it ? "

"Not at all, my dear Tony," Reni would answer in his charming, decisive way. "Is it being captain of one's soul to feel bound to say, when one is told that tickets have been taken for a play which one knows to be boring : 'But what fun ! ' Apart from everything else, it makes your language bankrupt. If you saw Christ in the flesh, I suppose you would say 'How exciting' ! "

Reni was always talking like that ; and he would frequently engage some Russian or German lady, in a perfectly natural way, in a conversation which would never be allowed in any English smoking-room or after the ladies had retired from the dinner-table.

He practised the principle of French directness with a vengeance. And Tony found it a great relief after the "no scandal before the servants" attitude of Burnans. Reni at least had cleared his mind of cant.

Dinner-party followed luncheon-party, and Tony's ten days drew to an end.

"Where would you like to go this evening ?" enquired Reni on the last night of Tony's stay.

"To somewhere fairly low, please," said Tony.

And after the cinema that night Reni drove him out into the gloomy Bastille *quartier*. It was a very small café to which they walked, after having parked the car a safe distance away ; and it had no awning and no open-air department. Inside, the dregs of Paris seemed to have gravitated together. All the women wore their hair too short ; and all the men wore theirs too long. On the near side of the room the tables were huddled right up against each other. On the far side about three square yards of floor bore the burden of a dozen couples of dancers. They were dancing a hybrid tango at the moment, to the accompaniment of a saxophone and a concertina. To the man with the concertina fell the additional duty of turning the lights from white to green and from green to red. A kind of servants' dance, Tony supposed, but with more venom in it. Suddenly, as the white light went up, he noticed something that he had not seen before – that only three of the couples dancing were man and woman. Of the rest, four were girl and girl, and three were man and man.

"Is this low enough for you ?" enquired Reni.

"Quite," said Tony abruptly. Really, it did make him feel rather sick. And then, to his surprise and discomfort, he caught sight of his enemy with the serpent eyes coming down from the floor. And even as he watched him, nauseated, a grey-faced youth who could

not have been more than seventeen years of age went up to the snaky one, and, with an imploring expression in his eyes, asked for the next dance. The serpent nodded.

"That," said Reni, pointing to the elder of the two that Tony was looking at, "is one of the biggest fairies in Paris."

"Really?" said Tony. It was a relief to hear Reni suggesting moving on. And it was very good to crawl safely into bed that night.

The next day, as his train lurched out of the Gare St. Lazare, Tony looked back upon Paris. Not Paris with her squat, undignified people, her abrupt cabbies, gibbering gendarmes, and hostile *bourgeoisie*, but Paris with her green boulevards, and grey embankments, and scurf of dingy bookstalls ; with her sweeping gardens and statue-sprinkled lawns ; with her Champs Elysées studded with a myriad lamps ; with the murmur of her Gargantuan traffic ; with the dirty stillness of her Seine ; with the nocturnal sparklings of her Eiffel Tower ; with the diabolical silence of the grotesque gargoyle of Notre-Dame. Paris with her bewildering contrasts : her flamboyant sins ; and her coy, retiring virtues.

XVI

PRESENTIMENT

WITH his handbag in his hand, Tony walked slowly up the hill to the school. It was September. Two months had intervened since he had last passed through those gates. All the leaves were beginning to fall ; the trees in the Avenue were already bare. Two months. It seemed like two years. Tony became suddenly aware of his 'oldness' and of the something which he had acquired in Paris.

Confidently, he knocked on the door of Jennings's drawing-room. There, inside, stood Jennings, irritatingly unchanged, bidding some new boy's parent an Attic farewell.

"And you have no children of your own, Mr. Jennings?"

"No. No ! My House is my child."

And the parent withdrew impressed.

"Well, Roretton, and how are you ? Clothed and in your right mind for your apprenticeship, I hope ?"

"Yes, sir."

Tony walked across to the other side of the House.

He ought by rights to have been a monitor this term. But Jennings had remembered the 'soap in the ventilator' incident. The monitors were standing talking in the door of Captain's study.

There was Masson, whose waistcoat fitted him too well. He was looking at his finger-nails. Had he dared, he would have grown side-whiskers. He had just "run the

Bentley down from town in the hour. Bloody good, eh, old man?"

There was Carey, a practical chemist and a theoretical cricketer.

There was Molyneux, who wore plus fours and had killed four brace of partridges that morning.

There was Sankey, who burst into the library wearing a black felt hat.

There was Sinclair, who said : " My God ! What a hat ! "

" A dam' good hat, John. I say, am I late for Jennings's meal ? I've just seen the Playhouse matinée. Frightfully good show."

Tony laughed as he thought of them. Charming people to have about the place. But Tony wanted someone who would listen to his ideas, who would exchange ideas with him. Someone who would solve the problem as to whether school life had any shape ; or whether ultimately it only consisted in a succession of House matches. In the mornings, things would seem to form nothing but a meaningless tangle. In the evenings, a comfortable contentment and belief that ' it would all come right in the end ' settled upon him. Curiously, often the transition between the two moods took place at about four o'clock in the afternoon, and assisted by the poetry of Housman. Every day Tony would analyse his attitude to the school and to life in general ; and every day he felt the need of telling someone else about his state of mind. For a week he resorted to making a chart of his moods. This revealed a zigzag line starting from the same level every morning and rising to an almost constant height every night. At last, with the approach of winter, the graph showed such a persistent tendency to fall that Tony got out of bed early one morning and burnt it.

Plainly, nobody in Jennings's was a suitable substitute for the graph. One day Tony asked Ronny Banton in the Hall to play fives and to bring a second player. Tony was surprised to find that Ronny had persuaded Roy Merrivale to play. Merrivale was a school fives colour-man now. Besides, his proper place had always seemed to be among the gods. Still, Merrivale seemed to be enjoying it. He was very quick on his feet, eager, restless, anticipative. He played all his shots with an easy grace and rhythm. Carey played hard but abstractedly : perhaps his mind was running on cricket. Ronny was almost too genial : commented rather too often on the game. As for Tony - he was surprised to find himself wondering whether he had made a good impression on Merrivale. He could understand it now - that lasting fascination that Merrivale possessed for people such as Canning.

The school bell started to ring.

" Will you come and walk about after call-over, Banton ? " Tony asked.

" Thanks. I should love to."

" I suppose you wouldn't come too, Merrivale ? "

Tony felt curiously anxious about the answer.

" Well, no. I'm afraid I've got to go to tea with Kitson. I'm sorry."

Tony was disappointed. But, then, one couldn't expect the gods to remain for ever with men. And it didn't matter, really.

After call-over, Tony met Ronny in the shop. Already the fog was collecting on the windows ; and the floor was strewn with chocolate wrappings and orange-peel. " Oh, Mrs. Bond ! " " Six whipped cream walnuts, please." " Edgar ! Oh, Edgar. Can I have three Cydraxes ? " The noise and the crowd of fags was overpowering. Ronny and Tony were getting rather ' above ' the shop.

As soon as one became a monitor, one deserted it altogether. If one wanted nourishment between meals, one went 'down town' or sent a 'boy' out to the shop.

"Shall we go outside, then?" Ronny said.

"Yes. Do let's."

They walked round through the masters' garden and down the Avenue.

"Do you remember that camp two years ago?" Tony said.

"Rather. Great, wasn't it?"

"Do you remember that night by the bathing-pool?"

"Yes! It was a bit like this, wasn't it?"

"And do you remember that grasshopper?"

"Good God! Yes!"

They looked at each other: laughed.

"Was it an accurate grasshopper?"

Tony smiled. He said: "Not very."

They were looking out over the mere. Slowly they turned; strolled gradually towards the masters' garden. One by one the lamps in the Avenue flickered up. On the far side of the Round the lights of the shop were falling in patches on the wet grass.

Raised voices. Overloud laughter. The tinkle of broken glass. The shop door banging. Someone running down the Walk. Someone throwing a ball against the wall of the darkened fives courts. Someone practising the organ in chapel. A distant call of "Boy" from the Hall. A jazz band in one of the farthest houses strumming 'What's the use of talking?'

Tony and Ronny heard all these things.

Under one of the lights in the Avenue two boys passed them. They wore mufflers and were turning their heads away, evidently not wishing to be seen.

"Who were those?" Tony asked.

"Oh, Merrivale and someone."

Tony said "Oh!" He was thinking that Kitson could not have had a very successful tea-party. Or perhaps no tea-party at all.

That night, after lights were out in the bedroom, Canning whispered: "Did you enjoy your fives?"

"Oh, quite!"

"How did *he* play?"

"Brilliantly, of course."

Canning sighed. "You are lucky," he said. "But then," he added, "of course you don't see that."

It was a quiet term for Tony.

"I hope, Roretton," Mr. Jennings had said, "I hope that this term you will show a sense of responsibility sufficient to enable me next term to place you in a position of authority."

And Tony had hoped so too.

It would, after all, be more comfortable in the monitors' common-room than among the hard kitchen chairs of his study. And there would be a fire, instead of these unlovely radiators. Thus Tony devoted himself to the decent and orthodox enthusiasms of work and games.

The Headmaster's zeal for the Classics was notoriously infectious. Indeed, he was reputed to know the text of all *Aeschylus* off by heart. Tony found a real enjoyment in watching the Head sit down squarely upon the throne-like chair at the end of the Sixth Form room, and, with his head tilted grandly upwards and his eyes fixed upon the roof of the chapel opposite, declaim some fiery speech of Clytemnestra's.

It was near the end of term. They had come to the scene where Agamemnon hesitates before he ascends the purple carpet to his death. The Sixth settled themselves in their desks. The Head inclined his mortar-board slightly over his right eye, and tilted his titan head

upward. Tony could see the huge curve of his nose against a pane of the stained glass window.

"Εστιν θάλασσα, τις δέ νιν κατασβέσει; the double 's' hissed out across the room. As he looked at the Head's Demosthenic posture, Tony could not repress a smile of pleasure. Unfortunately, at that instant Mr. Vernon looked down and caught Tony's expression. A second's pause. And the great head was again tilted, and the sounding voice boomed on. For the rest of the speech Tony kept his eyes rigidly on the book in front of him. But his thoughts were with Clytemnestra there in Argos.

The school bell rang. Gradually the Sixth Form room emptied. Tony heard his name called. He walked up to the dais.

The Headmaster leant forward, and his mortar-board fell even more over his right eye.

"Were you smiling at *Æschylus* or at myself?" he said.

Tony hesitated.

"*Æschylus*, sir."

Mr. Vernon rose from his chair, and set his mortar-board straight.

"I see. But don't you admire him?"

"Yes, sir. Very much."

The Head stared at Tony thoughtfully for several seconds; and then, without another word, walked past him out of the room.

The last day of term. Tony and Ronny went 'down town' to tea.

"Are you glad the holidays are to-morrow?" Tony asked.

"Yes. I am, rather. I've got rather an amusing dance on Saturday."

"I don't know why, but I somehow don't find dancing amusing."

"Don't you know any girls you like?"

"Not particularly."

Tony was thinking how attractive Ronny must be to girls. That smile of his - and that charming, if slightly affected, manner.

"As a matter of fact," Tony admitted, "I always seem to be at my worst with girls."

Ronny smiled and took out his note-case. Tony glanced round the café. The waitress came up, and, apparently ignoring Tony's hand, put the bill on Ronny's plate. Ronny passed an envelope over to him. Tony opened it and pulled out a photograph - a Photomaton of a girl in a neat little cloche hat. Rather pretty, Tony thought.

"How old is she?" he said at last.

"Eighteen a week to-morrow."

Tony sighed. How grown-up Ronny had suddenly become.

And what a child was *he*.

"And we're very pleased to see you again, sir." Thus Lewis, the butler, employing, as was his wont, the royal 'we.'

"Well, Tony, had a good term?"

Sir Francis laid down *The Nation* and sat forward in his chair.

"Very good, thanks, father. Not an awful lot doing. How are the pheasants?"

"Fair, very fair, I think, though not quite so good as Hodge expected."

Lady Roretton came into the room. He kissed her warmly.

"Well, darling, how are you? Have you had a nice term?"

"Quite good, thanks, mummy, though not very eventful."

A pause. Sir Francis stealthily resumed *The Nation*.

"How did your clothes do?"

"Oh! quite well, thanks, mummy. I may need a new suit, though."

Pause. Sir Francis emerged a moment from hiding.

"And how did you leave young Jennings?"

"Fairly well, I think, father."

"Full of Homer, I suppose." Sir Francis chuckled appreciatively.

Tony looked at the fire.

"I think I'd better go and get some things out of my box."

"Well, I don't think I should, dear, quite yet. Lewis always likes to unpack by himself."

Tony's glance wandered round the room.

"Hullo! a new book, mummy?"

"Yes, dear. The Complete Kipling. Daddy's been reading it a lot."

Sir Francis grunted assent.

"We must have a talk about things some time, Tony," he said.

"Yes, father." Tony wondered whether he followed the train of thought: Kipling . . . a serious talk. Suspicious!

"And the Clarindons are coming to tea."

"The whole lot of them, mummy?"

"Only Mrs. and Molly."

"Oh."

The Clarindons did come to tea.

"You know my son, Tony, don't you, Molly?"

Her ladyship smiled graciously.

"He's just come back from school to-day."

(All right! All right! No need to rub it in.)

"Really?" Molly Clarindon was eighteen, and looked older.

"Yes," said Tony, in a voice he did not recognise. Molly Clarindon looked 'Londonish.' She scared him.

"Have you been . . ." Tony started on a sentence; became confused; and took to his tea-cup.

Really, one saw so few females in term-time that it was difficult to know what to say to them.

"Have you been having an amusing half?" Obviously Molly was doing her best.

"Oh, yes. Yes, quite, thanks very much."

After all, what more was there to say about the term? One couldn't tell her about House matches, or about Ronny. What did people talk about at these inane tea-parties?

"And what House are you in?"

Tony hesitated; wondered.

"Jennings's," he said fatuously.

Molly's eyebrows flickered upwards.

Lady Roretton leant towards her.

"He's not at Eton, you know," she confided apologetically.

"Oh . . . Oh. I see."

Tony returned to his tea-cup.

"Well! Have you ever heard such a thing, Sir Francis?" Mrs. Clarindon's twitter rose in crescendo.

"I should think not, Mrs. Clarindon!"

"Twelve guns in two rows of six to shoot the Gilverley coverts."

"Well, I never!" Sir Francis laughed with moderation. "Who was that, did you say, Mrs. Clarindon?"

"This person who has taken the Gilverley shooting."

"Oh! That person!"

But even this conversation came to an end at last. And Tony was relieved when ten o'clock came and Sir Francis

had forgotten to have his talk about things. He was glad, too, to get to bed again. Really, these tea-parties were quite bewildering. Even the ladies that lived round Burnans dazed him, fresh as he was from the dim masculine community of Towers Hill.

It was not till quite late on in the holidays that Sir Francis remembered that he had something to say to his son.

"We must have a talk after we come in this evening," he announced at breakfast.

And all the morning, as he jogged along the squidgey lanes, among the fifty or so other people on horseback, Tony wondered what his father was going to say to him. The hounds found early in the afternoon and ran their fox to ground after seventy minutes. Tony came in muddy and comfortably tired. As he lay in his bath, he wondered. Really he had enjoyed his ride; and there was nothing he liked better than to be heartily weary; and yet . . . and yet . . .

Sir Francis was already changed when Tony arrived down in the smoking-room. More than ever this evening he reminded Tony of something between a Norman knight and a major prophet, with his well-groomed white hair and princely white moustache.

"Just sit down a moment, will you, Tony?"

Tony seated himself on the arm of a chair.

"Now about your career. . . ." Sir Francis fumbled with the outside page of *The New Statesman*.

"Yes, father?"

"Well, I expect you have an opinion on the matter?"

"I'm not sure really." Tony hesitated. "What would you advise, father?"

"Well, of course, it's for you to decide, my boy. I don't know, for instance, how you feel about estate agency. . . ."

Tony bent down and tied up his shoelace.

"I don't feel very drawn that way," he admitted at last.
"Well?"

"Well, at the present moment, I should quite like to be a schoolmaster."

Sir Francis looked up quickly.

"Oh, but that's surely hardly . . ." He stopped, unable to find words for his traditional reactions to that profession.

"Why, father, what's the matter with schoolmasters?"

"Of course, there's nothing the *matter* with them, Tony, but—"

Sir Francis put his foot down heavily on the spaniel which lay on the hearthrug.

"Oh! I don't know. I suppose it's all these Classics that you do."

Tony shrugged his shoulders. Sir Francis returned to his *New Statesman*.

"How do you do, Roretton? You've been hunting, I expect? Yes. Well, I hope you are going to make a loyal monitor. Oh, yes; and supper is at 7.30 this evening. I shall expect to see you with the others."

Tony walked out of Jennings's drawing-room and made his way up to the monitors' common-room. For the first time he went in without knocking. A couple of new boys eyed him reverently from without. He was the first monitor to arrive. Yes, this common-room was certainly comfortable, with its fire and armchairs and reading-lamp.

A taxi drew up outside. Two minutes, and Sankey, still wearing the black hat, walked into the room.

"Hullo, Roretton! Had good holidays? So've I. Like hell. What! did you see *Cochran's Revue* too?"

"Damn good, wasn't it?" Tony agreed.

Sankey hung up his exquisitely rolled umbrella and laid his hat carefully on the table.

" Got a hair-brush ? "

Tony took a brush out of his hand bag.

" Oh, yes ! " Sankey went on. " Another thrill ! I met my father for the first time last hols. And really, d'you know, I found him *very* interesting ! "

Tony was puzzled.

" But hadn't you ever seen him before ? "

" Seen him ? I should dam' well think so. I'd lived with him for seventeen years. But I'd never got talking with him before. Properly, I mean ; sensibly and all that. Rather good, eh ? "

" Funny," said Tony. " I don't seem to have 'met' my father at all yet."

Canning, the other new monitor, walked in.

" Hullo, Sankey."

" Hullo, Canning."

" Oh, hullo, Tony. How are you, old boy ? "

" Hullo, Canns. Good hols ? "

" Ruddy."

" No luck with your Christmas cards ? "

" Dam' all."

Sankey did not understand.

" You don't send Christmas cards, do you ? " he asked.

" One," said Canning carelessly, " or occasionally two."

" Well," said Sankey weightily, " a man who sends Christmas cards bloody well deserves to have them returned unstamped."

Tony caught Canning's eye questioningly. Canning shook his head : smiled a little.

Masson banged the door wide open and swaggered in.

" Hullo, Roretton. Hullo, Canning. Hullo, John ! "

He threw a pair of large leather motoring gauntlets against the fender.

" God ! Isn't this a bloody hole ? Not a glimpse of a girl from February till April."

" You're in a bad way, Robert. What's happened ? "

" Oh, I don't know," Masson muttered. " I smashed the flaming Bentley up yesterday. The pater's a bit bored."

Mr. Masson, Tony remembered, was a cotton king.

" What a bore," said Sankey sympathetically.

Tony's first day as a monitor passed pleasurable away. His bedroom was quite easy to deal with. On the second morning he called " Boy " unhesitatingly twice, and sent two senior fags over to one of the farthest Houses. When one of them - Paine - pouted, Tony threatened to beat him ; and Paine went meekly away.

After Head's roll, Tony met Mr. Kitson on his way to the school buildings.

" How do you do, Roretton ? And have you enjoyed the holidays ? "

" Quite, thank you, sir."

" Good. So've I."

" Really, sir ? "

" Yes. I was staying with the Bantons part of the time. They're charming."

" Oh, yes, sir."

" You're a monitor now, Roretton ? "

" Yes, sir."

Mr. Kitson smiled impishly.

" Be loyal, my boy, be loyal," he said.

Tony made an efficient House prefect. All his five colleagues were a year senior to him ; for he had been made a prefect early, as being the prospective Head of the House. His tact, and a firm first few days, disarmed

much of the *invidia* which was apt at Towers Hill to fall on a boy who was made a prefect before the usual time.

Quite early in the term he made the acquaintance of Mr. Laing. Mr. Laing was a wild-looking Classical-side master, who appeared to the school to resemble the Devil. His head was entirely bald, save for two unkempt horn-like tufts of hair which sprouted from the middle of the two sides of his head. His eyebrows were pointed Chinese-wise. And he walked like a cat. Mr. Laing was something of a mystery to the school and to the staff. It was believed that he was a nature worshipper. And it was quite certain that he produced annually for the school its only dramatic entertainment.

This year Laing had decided to do *X - O, A Story of the Trojan War*, by John Drinkwater. Tony had applied for a part. He was delighted to hear that he had been accepted; and he was fascinated and intrigued to know that Merrivale was also of the cast.

At about half-term Tony went to tea with Laing. All the time that Tony was eating, Laing prowled round and round the room with quick, nervous steps, his shirt open at the neck, and every now and then throwing out some biting ejaculation. Tony gathered that the man was very ill-satisfied with the Public School system.

"The deadness, Roretton! The stagnation! God knows, a school ought to be the one place where people are alive! Young, bright, untarnished minds that could be guided into any living shape. And what d'you get? Pedants! Fetters! Dead men chaining the living! Dead men with dead minds mortifying the young! Dead men at meetings protesting they are alive! Dead men running after footballs!"

"And then what d'you get? Animals! Bullocks! Look at Kipp's house. Full of arrant Philistines! Oxen!"

Tony laughed quietly at this estimate of Kipp's.

"No. No, Roretton. I mean it. I'm not laughing. Just tell me now how they're different from animals! How? They speak. Well, they can't help that. They wear clothes. Because they're made to. Convention! Otherwise they are *mere animals*. Bullocks!"

"Well," said Tony, "that may be so. But who is there alive at all in the world? How can one escape this deadness?"

"I don't know, Roretton. I don't know." Laing stopped pacing round the room; and the hornlike tufts of hair ceased to quiver.

"I don't know," he went on more quietly. "It's hard. It's hard unless we're born alive. Most of the people here were still-born. Not in the crude, physical way. But with the real, more terrible, spiritual deadness. There's only one Lawrence."

"Who's he?" Tony enquired innocently.

"Not nice, Roretton. Not nice. Not one of the right people at all. Dangerous. Dangerous. But the greatest living English novelist." His voice rose shrilly. "Yes, the greatest. Defiant! Dilating! Gigantic! Demoniac! Alive! Alive!" And his voice died away in a wail. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Otherwise," he went on, "if one's born half-dead one must just try and keep in touch with nature. Fire! Water! Earth! Burn like fire! Flow like a river! D'you know these lines:

*'Once I had a lover, bright like running water!
Once, his face was open like the sky!'*

"No," said Tony. "They're good, aren't they?"

"Genius, Roretton. Sheer genius!"

"Who by, sir?"

"Why, Lawrence!"

Tony had to get back early.

"Yes," Laing exclaimed as he saw him through the door, "if I didn't get to the hills every holidays, I'd go off my head."

Tony and Ronny were now able to go 'down town' on nearly every half-holiday for tea, as Tony had prefects' privileges and there was very little rugger in the Easter term. Lady Roretton decided to come and watch the sports on the last Monday, and take Tony home with her on the following day. She had asked him to dinner with her at the hotel on Sunday night, and had hoped that he would 'bring a nice friend.'

On Sunday evening Tony and Ronny walked 'down town' together. As they passed along the Round, they saw Roy Merrivale practising hurdles for the next day. Very graceful he looked in his white shorts and vest, and with his legs all bare. Very graceful as he sped with perfect rhythm over the black hurdles. Carelessly once he glanced in their direction. Tony saw that his eyes were very bright, and that their elusive violet hue was more intense than ever. The line of his head curved like a Parian marble. Tony and Ronny passed on down the walk.

"An amazing person, Merrivale."

"Yes," said Tony, "he is the remotest person I have ever seen. He's an island in himself. He seems just unaware of his fellow-creatures."

"Yes. He's certainly remote."

"Utterly inaccessible."

Tony changed the conversation.

"By the way, Ronny, how did Kitson get on when he was staying with you?"

"Oh! he went down splendidly. Naturally."

"Did Helen like him?"

"Pretty well. Yes. In fact, definitely well."

Somehow, Tony felt, Ronny always became on the defensive when his sister was mentioned.

They walked on in silence. As they turned down into the High Street, Ronny said:

"I say, Tony, what d'you think your mother's going to think of me? I've never shot anything but rabbits, and I can't always tell one end of a horse from another."

Tony laughed. It was hard to believe that Ronny was nervous.

"You'll be all right, Ronny," he said.

He was confident that Ronny's slightly affected manner would appeal to his mother.

When they reached the hotel, Lady Roretton was waiting in the lounge. She received them both with quiet dignity. Tony noticed with approval that she was, as usual, extremely well dressed.

"I've heard such a lot about you, Mr. Banton," she said.

Ronny executed a half-bow and smiled.

"Is dinner ready, mummy?"

"Yes, quite, darling."

Tony had determined to take charge of the conversation.

"Ronny's not allowed to overeat, because he's running to-morrow."

"Are you, Mr. Banton? How *very* interesting!"

"And I'm sure he hates being called Mr. Banton, don't you, Ronny?"

Her ladyship smiled. And Tony congratulated himself that he had handled the situation deftly.

"And what races are you running in - er - Ronny?"

Yes, his mother was obviously enjoying her conversation with this prospective quarter-mile winner.

After dinner, Tony explained that they really ought to leave immediately.

"Very well, dear. Good-bye, Ronny, till to-morrow. Good-bye, Tony."

Lady Roretton kissed her son lavishly : in an undertone whispered : "What a *nice* friend, darling."

It was a relief to both of them to get out into the street again. For a minute they walked along silently in the light of the shop windows.

"Well?" Tony said at last.

"Well," Ronny answered. "What was the verdict?"

"You were a success."

"Really?"

They walked in silence till they came to the lane leading down to the mere. Far above them, the lights of the school buildings were rushing across the Round and breaking themselves against the boughs of the chestnuts in the walk. In silence they walked up the hill. Occasionally a faint rustle sounded to the side of them as a young rabbit dashed into the clumps of rhododendrons. The rooks in the trees above them fluttered uneasily in their nests. The smell of moss and thyme and the first fragrance of daffodils rose from the ground. Reverently, they carried their hats in their hands. A dim moon was struggling to slide in between two tattered belts of cloud. Very beautiful the moon's eyes in the still water ; very silent the naked elms.

Almost profanely, Ronny broke the silence.

"Did I ever tell you, Tony," he said, "that my uncle keeps a rather small butcher's shop in Epsom?"

A butcher ! Good God ! A butcher ! Tony was astounded.

"No," he said at last conversationally, "I don't think you did." Hurriedly he went on : "My aunt keeps a draper's shop, too. Er - is he nice, your uncle?"

"Very," said Ronny unaffectedly. "He sends us a tongue every Christmas."

Tony was glad the next term to find himself playing cricket well. It was a great comfort not to have to struggle to keep one's place in the side ; and there was nothing that he found more satisfactory than sitting up on his bedroom window-sill late into a summer night talking quietly to Canning, and gazing out over the darkened ground, where, in the afternoon, he had been playing an enjoyable innings.

Generally Canning would ask about Roy Merrivale ; for Tony was being thrown up against Merrivale continually now - at rehearsals, where Roy and Tony played opposite each other as the Trojan soldiers, Ilus and Capys ; and at cricket lunches, where Roy seemed to prefer Tony's company to that of any other member of the XI. Gradually Tony broke down the barrier between Roy and the world ; and for him those indescribable 'Keep your distance' glances became few and far between.

It was wonderful to be able to walk about the Round on school-match days with this fascinatingly remote boy, and, elusive as he was, to hold him for five minutes in conversation. Roy had no very high opinion of his fellow-creatures ; but quietly and discreetly Tony pleaded Canning's cause. It was not easy ; for Roy was specially intolerant of people who wanted to get to know him - of people who longed to approach the unapproachable.

At first, at the mere mention of Canning's name, Roy's eye would light up with a wilful, half-contemptuous expression, as if to say : "Don't presume too much. I have allowed you to approach me. Do you dare to bring all your friends as well?" And in the evening Tony would

try to explain to Canning how difficult it was to get near this inaccessible creature.

"Oh, but please, Tony, *please* ask him just to speak to me. Any time. Anything."

"Well, I'll try, Canns. But you know . . ."

"Ask him if he'll come and talk after the play on speech-day."

"I'll see what I can do. But it's only a chance. . . ."

And, because he knew that Canning's happiness for the next few months depended upon it, Tony made the request to Roy one evening after a rehearsal. Roy glanced quickly at Tony, and then stared intensely out of the window.

"All right," he said at last ; and walked quickly from the room.

Tony ran back to the House to tell Canning. And Canning for the first time in two years was madly and deliriously happy.

Things were indeed piling up for speech-day. Lady Roretton had written to say that she was coming down for the day. Ronny had told him that his mother and father were to stay two nights. And Mr. Kitson had added that Helen Banton was coming too. Why, Tony wondered, hadn't Ronny told him about his sister ; and why had Kitson volunteered the information ?

XVII

MELODRAMATICS

ANYHOW, Tony was very excited when he woke up earlier than usual on speech-day morning. It was to be an entertaining day. He would derive considerable pleasure from escorting his mother round the school grounds. She would be at her best among the crowds of mothers and sisters. Then he would perhaps enjoy the cricket match ; and certainly he would revel in the play which was to follow it. The æsthete-athlete ! The idea pleased him considerably. Furthermore, at the end of all that, there was to be the Roy-Canning conversation ; a flavouring of intrigue which he secretly relished.

As he changed into his flannels, Tony wondered what Mr. and Mrs. Banton would be like ; charming, to judge by their son - and yet there was this complication in the shape of the Epsom butcher. Where, Tony wondered, did he come in ? The family ne'er-do-well, perhaps, in reduced circumstances.

Certainly Tony was not prepared for the couple whom he saw Ronny guiding towards him between the tea-tables and tents.

"May I introduce you to my mother and father, Tony ?" A little self-consciously Tony bowed. Where on earth was Helen ?

"Pleased to meet you," said Mrs. Banton pleasantly.

Mr. Banton nodded.

"It's very gallant of you to have come all this way," Tony began expansively.

Either Mrs. Banton did not hear, or else she did not understand. At any rate, her next remark made no attempt to compete with Tony's opening.

" You've got a nice day for it all," she said.

" Yes. It might be worse." Tony was no more shy now than he would have been with the wife of the Burnans gardener.

" I think we'd better go and look for the Headmaster," said Ronny discreetly. And Tony bowed slightly as the Bantons walked past him towards the Hall.

What queer people, thought Tony, as he walked up the steps of the pavilion. Mrs. Banton : a sort of female Rosenkrantz, pleasant, placid, plebeian. Mr. Banton—? Mr. Banton had not spoken a word, so that it was impossible to tell whether or not he dropped his h's. He reminded Tony inevitably of a shopwalker.

These people Ronny's parents ! It was incredible.

And there was his own mother just stepping out of the Daimler.

" Hullo, mummy ! You're just in time to see me go in."

" Splendid, darling ! And I know you're going to hit lots of boundaries, as usual."

Tony led his mother to a seat where her somewhat incorrect cricket phraseology could be less easily overheard.

" Why, isn't that Ronny Banton I see sitting on the grass over there ? "

Tony groaned inwardly.

" No ! Is it ? Yes, I believe it is, though."

" Oh, but do ask him to come and talk to me while you're out batting."

" Of course, mummy."

Tony went over to the seat and brought Ronny back. It was really surprising how well Ronny and Lady Roretton got on together.

A girl and a man walked past them with their heads turned away. They were looking at the match. Suddenly Tony recognised Mr. Kitson and Helen Banton ! A paroxysm of jealousy shook him. Mockingly he raised his cap. Kitson took off his hat with an extravagant sweep to Lady Roretton, and shot at Tony a roguish, triumphant smile.

" Who is that girl ? " Lady Roretton's whisper was resonant. Ronny blushed. He said :

" That is my sister."

" Oh, *really*, Ronny ? How pretty she looks. And that's her husband with her, I suppose ? "

" No. Oh, no," said Ronny and Tony simultaneously. Tony laughed carelessly. He felt fiendishly jealous.

" I'm afraid I really must go back to my people," said Ronny.

" Oh, are *your* parents here ? " enquired her ladyship. " Won't you introduce me, Ronald ? I should *so* like to meet them."

" But of course, I should love to introduce them," Ronny murmured. He glanced towards Tony ; and Tony looked into the mirror of his own apprehensions.

" They're seeing the Headmaster just at present," Ronny explained. " But when they come back . . ." And with a smile he fled away into the crowd of mothers and sisters.

And very firmly Tony took his mother off to see Mr. Jennings.

No sooner had Tony changed out of his cricket things than it was time to go across to the concert hall and get dressed for the play. The play was to act as a kind of curtain-raiser to the concert proper. Tony had arranged with Canning to slip out immediately after the last scene, meet him outside the doors, and go together to the Walk, where Roy had promised to meet Canning.

Tony knew that he was going to enjoy acting this evening. Tragic situations and legitimate occasions for melodrama were so rare in real life.

With considerable pleasure he tied his crimson cloak to his shoulders and put his curving helmet on his head. He looked at himself in the glass. He ought, he felt, to have been born a Trojan.

"Are you ready to be made up, Roretton?" Mr. Laing was prowling about cat-like among the cast, adjusting a wig here, and using a blue pencil there.

"I haven't got my leggings on yet."

"That's doesn't matter. I think I'd better do you now. Merrivale's finished; and they're beginning to get into their seats."

And Mr. Laing smeared a preliminary grease-paint over Tony's forehead and cheeks.

At last: "Good. That'll do for you. Now you're Capys." And Tony went back into the dressing-room to put on his leggings. Roy was standing by the looking-glass.

"Hullo. Good Lord!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tony.

Roy smiled. "I hardly recognised you," he said.

Tony looked at Roy. He was wearing a silver-coloured wig, wavy and rather long. His face was its natural ivory colour. His eyes seemed brighter and more eager than ever. The lips had been emphasised and made to curve a little downwards. His legs and his feet were bare. He wore a blue doublet; and a scarlet cloak hung royally over one shoulder.

"Do I look all right?" Roy said.

"Quite," Tony said. He was thinking: "You are looking very beautiful."

They went and peeped between the curtains. The hall was nearly full. In the fifth row from the front Tony

noticed Kitson. He was smiling. Tony saw that he was sitting between Mrs. Banton and Helen - entertaining them, no doubt.

"Come on. Come on," he heard Laing's voice in the green-room. "Salvius and Pronax. It's nearly the half."

Neither he nor Roy was in the first scene. They went to the wings. A gong sounded three times. The curtain rose. A Grecian tent on the plain before Troy. A starry summer night. Two young Greek soldiers were seated in their tent, yearning for Hellas.

*"So is the night often at home. I have seen
Bright orchards white under a summer moon. . . ."*

One of them, Salvius, is reading poems - the songs of Greon. The other, Pronax, is arming himself to creep along the Trojan wall and snatch a Trojan life. For a little they watch the stars. Then Pronax goes out into the night, and Salvius sits reading in the tent.

The curtain fell. The audience clapped - only dutifully, as it seemed to Tony. Perhaps it was all rather above their heads. He ran on to the stage and helped to move the tent. The stage cleared. He climbed on to the balustrade which was to be Troy wall; threw back his cloak over one shoulder so that the scarlet lining glowed in the blue of the footlights. He drew himself up and gazed out into the wings. The curtain rose slowly. Evidently the setting pleased the audience. They clapped - genuinely, spontaneously. Tony thrilled with pride. He, he was a Trojan. He surveyed the plain of Troy.

Illus, with a bearskin flung lavishly about his body, stole out of the shadows. Tony glimpsed the unearthly fairness of his features against the black fur.

ILUS : "When does your watch end?"

CAPYS : "In two hours ; at midnight."

ILUS : "They're beautiful, those tents under the stars.
It is my night to go like a shadow among them,
And, snatching a Greek life, come like a shadow again.
It's an odd skill to have won in the rose of your
youth.

*Two years and once in seven days – a hundred,
More than a hundred and only once a fault.
A hundred Greek boys, Capys, like myself –
Loving, and quick in honour, and clean of fear –
Spoiled in their beauty by me whose desire is beauty
Since first I walked the April hedgerows. . . .*

Tony smiled as he listened. Roy was speaking his lines beautifully. Perhaps he realised their strange truth. Perhaps he felt just as much Ilus as Roy. Perhaps he was Ilus. Perhaps they were the same. Roy, son of Ilus. Roy. Ilus. Roy. It was hypnotic, that voice of the fatal Trojan under the barbaric stars. At last the audience was held. Tony glided out of Tony : passed into Capys. Capys addressed Ilus now : not Tony, Roy :

*"It is still upon the plains to-night, and the stars
Are a lantern against you – you must go
Warily, Ilus. The loss of many friends
Has sharpened my love, not dulled me against loss.
I am careful for you to-night in all this beauty
Of glowing summer – disaster might choose this night
So brutally, and so disaster likes.
Go warily."*

Capys to Ilus now. Not Tony to Roy. For Capys was Tony, and Ilus, Roy. And with a low whistle Ilus swung himself over the wall, and dropped down to the plain

below. Silence. Capys walked slowly along the wall. A hand groped on the parapet. Pronax rose, stealthily, silently : sprang upon Capys : drew out his dagger, peered out over the wall : vanished.

The curtain fell. In spite of themselves, the audience were cheering. Tony rose from the place where he had died and walked back to the green-room. It was empty. Everyone was helping to shift the scene. He was excited and a little sad. He ought to have been born a Trojan. A Capys to die for Ilus.

Roy came into the room.

"Oh ! Well done ! You were superb, Roretton."

"Thanks, Merrivale."

Roretton ! Merrivale ! Would they were Capys and Ilus still.

Laing passed quickly round the back of the stage.

"Good show, you men ; keep it up. Give it life ! "

Tony sat on in the green-room, his head in his hands. A sudden silence on the part of the audience. The third scene would have begun. At last he got up and walked dazedly to the wings.

It was the return of Pronax. Stupidly Tony watched him washing the blood off his hands, and talking the while to Salvius. But Salvius was dead – killed without a cry by the Trojan Ilus.

At last Pronax discovered.

*"Dead . . . it is done . . . it is done . . . there is Judgment
made.*

*Beauty is broken . . . and there on the Trojan wall
One too shall come . . . one too shall come. . . ."*

The curtain fell. And Tony went once more on to the stage – this time to be the body of Capys, lying in the starlight, in the silence, on the Trojan wall. For two

minutes he lay there, believing himself almost to be dead. Silence. Everywhere silence. The light of the stars was fading. Breath was failing. He was Capys. He was dead. He was Trojan. Was he? Would that he were. Oh! would that he were! From below the wall, the whistle of Ilus — the signal for the rope to be lowered. Very still he lay, and silent. Was he not Capys? Was not Capys dead? Would he not therefore die?

Another audible silence. Another whistle. Silence. Silence. The stars were fading. The curtain was falling. Perhaps he too was dying. Perhaps he was discarding his old self. Perhaps he too was Capys.

"Get up! What the devil are you lying there for?" A kick in the thigh from Laing.

"Get up, man. Come and take your call. Don't lie there as if you were dead."

He went and stood next to Ilus — or, rather, next to Roy.

And, as the curtain fell for the last time, he caught sight of Kitson and Helen Banton. Helen was clapping violently. And Kitson — he wore his Puckish smile.

It was a perfect English summer night into which Tony and Canning stepped just as the orchestra was playing the opening bars of the *Figaro* overture. It was that period of a July evening when all the colours are becoming one colour, and all the sounds are merging into one sound. The drowsy air was fragrant with the smell of roses. A sluggish breeze stirred the yellow of the laburnums. Silently Tony and Canning walked on down the Avenue. It was Canning's hour now — the hour for which he had waited a school-time; for which he had sent up so many blasphemous prayers. Tony remembered his own meeting with Peter under one of those huge chestnuts in the Walk. It had been winter then; and the bleak grey sky had eyed them with disdain. Now the sky was cloudless

and faintly blue; and the warm moss round the tree-trunks was littered with pink and white blossoms. Silence was lying over the scented earth. Only faintly and rarely from the concert hall the wild fluttering notes of violins. Silently they turned down the Walk. Below them and to the left the water of the mere had caught and held the fugitive tints of the sky. For the rest — the purple rhododendrons were darkened against their leaves.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet.

They trod softly over the yielding moss, for Tony was still wearing his sandals, as well as his Trojan doublet and cloak. They came to the dim clearing by the gate down to the mere.

Tony hesitated.

"Shall I leave you, Dick?"

Canning started, as though waking from a trance. Then :

"No. Just stay till he comes," and he leant back against the trunk of a giant chestnut and stared upwards through the branches at the quiet sky. Tony went and stood by another tree ten yards or so away.

It was all strangely unreal : he in his Trojan armour in the English twilight, waiting, waiting. And Dick waiting, waiting, amid the fantastic trunks of the chestnuts, while the smell of clover and hyacinths rose like incense from the grass. It was hard to believe that the whole thing was not another play. So fitly could he speak those words again :

*"I am careful for you to-night in all this beauty
Of glowing summer — disaster might choose this night
So brutally, and so disaster likes."*

Tony glanced towards Dick. He was no longer staring at the sky now ; he was watching the path down which Roy would come to him. What, Tony wondered, would they say to each other — these two people who, during all their years at school, had never had two minutes' converse together ? Perhaps, like Peter and he, they would say nothing. Perhaps, like Peter and he, they would achieve that same sublime experience, that flood of intangible rapture. He looked down over the mere. The horizon was growing dark. A lean streak of crystalline green was the sole relic of the setting sun.

Suddenly Tony heard the sound of voices. Very loud they sounded in the still air. A second later he saw through the branches Roy and another strolling slowly down the Walk. They were talking. Rather profane, that, Tony thought. To his surprise, Congreve, the other person, did not stop and turn back at the entrance to the clearing. Still he came on, and still Roy talked. Tony caught sight of Dick, with his head thrown back against the tree-trunk, and a tense smile upon his face. And still Roy and Congreve strolled on, talking. Would they never see Dick ? Roy was still dressed as Ilus ; and with his left hand he held the lower hem of his cloak. Surely they had seen Dick ? No ! they were walking past, within two yards of him. Suddenly they stopped talking. Tony saw Roy turn his head with a shake of his silver wig ; he caught the expression on Roy's face. It was contempt ; mocking, calculated contempt. Then cruelly, diabolically, Roy laughed : a rehearsed, purposeful laugh.

" Ha-ha. Ha-ha-ha. Oh, Congers ! Oh, my God ! Ha-ha-ha ! "

And his body quivered with mirth. Once more the silver curls shook themselves out, and Roy turned his head for a last death-giving glance. Another peal of

laughter. Another " Oh, my God !" And Roy was gone.

Tony looked over towards Dick. He was stretched out, limp, against the tree. His eyes were shut. His face was expressionless. And, looking at him, Tony was reminded of a crucifixion.

Tony went up to him ; but still he did not move. Tony put his arm through his, and lifted him from against the tree. He guided him towards the Walk. Dick did not speak ; did not resist. He walked mechanically, like a robot, a man of stone. Perhaps, thought Tony, from tonight . . . He remembered the words of Capys :

*" Disaster might choose this night
So brutally, and so disaster likes."*

And of Ilus :

*" A hundred Greek boys, Capys, like myself,
Spoiled in their beauty by me whose desire is beauty."*

Perhaps — the thought came to Tony — perhaps Roy had known even as he was speaking those words to the audience. Perhaps he had thrived on their hideous irony. Perhaps all this had been premeditated, planned.

A shuddering horror of Merrivale seized him — the repulsion as from a snake.

They were nearly at Jennings's by now. Suddenly across the road a small dark form went bounding. Immediately a weird scream shrilled out from the shrubbery, and another dark form bounded across the path. The hideous din rose in crescendo, the wild demoniac screeching of half-mad cats. Again and again it came, raucous, sinister, barbaric.

For the first time Canning looked up from the path. " A banshee," he said.

Mentally, Canning had been crucified indeed. His most intimate, sacred emotions had been placarded up and mocked. The next day Tony had the greatest difficulty in getting him to go to chapel at all.

"No, Tony, I might meet him. And I can't face him. D'you see, I can *not* face him."

Finally Tony had to go forward as an advanced guard to make sure that Canning should not be brought face to face with Merrivale. Apart from this, when there was no danger of an embarrassing encounter, Canning behaved almost normally; but Tony knew that for him life had virtually come to an end. And inevitably Tony was aware of that 'something not displeasing' in this, his friend's catastrophe, which might so easily have been his own.

For the remaining three weeks of that term, as Tony perceived, Canning literally never saw Roy again: a state of affairs only made possible by systematic evasions and sudden about-turns.

And that, thought Tony, was that — as far as the pattern of Canning's life went. Tony for the time being cut off his association with Roy, and was chagrined to notice that Roy did not apparently miss his company in the least. Tony resumed the liaison.

His moods still fluctuated between a quiet, unobtrusive pessimism and a Pippa-like optimism. But the optimism resided in a layer of consciousness deeper down than the pessimism. Tony was only aware of that underlying optimism at rare, brief moments. Occasionally, just on waking up, or just before falling asleep, and occasionally when reading Housman's poetry or when talking to Roy, some chisel-edge of thought or feeling would pierce the first stratum, and lay bare an ineradicable faith in the ultimate decency of things.

The last that Tony saw of Roy that term was on an

evening when they had been playing cricket against one of the south-coast schools.

"Will you sit next to me to-morrow at lunch?" Tony had asked suddenly, and rather stupidly.

And Roy had stared at him without answering; and then had turned and run down on to the beach, and out over the deserted sands, towards the setting sun.

XVIII

IMPERIUM

I

IT was again September. The dull year devoted to preparation for the Captaincy of the House was over. And Tony was glad to be back again. The holidays had been quietly pleasant. In vain had Tony scrutinised all the girls in the neighbourhood ; with none of them could he possibly persuade himself that he was in love. The head still maintained its supremacy over the heart. He had failed as a friend ; he had failed to find someone to love. He would, he determined, succeed as a leader. And it was with his mind full of theories for the right government of a House at a Public School that he made his entry into Mr. Jennings's drawing-room on the first day of the winter term. The Captain of the House, he had decided, must be, to all appearances, infallible. It had been a matter of surprise to some people that Mr. Jennings had carried out his original intention of making Roretton Captain of the House. But Tony had always shared Mr. Jennings's confidence in himself.

On this particular afternoon, as he opened the drawing-room door, Tony felt more than usually confident. He held his head very high. The official reason for his arriving so early on the first day was that he might assist his housemaster give tea to new boys and their parents. It was the first time that Tony had experienced the satisfaction of a vastly superior position.

"This," Jennings was saying, "is Roretton, the head of my House."

He saw one of the mothers look up quickly from her tea-cup.

"Mrs. Downes, Mrs. Higson, Captain Norwich," Jennings continued.

Gravely Tony bowed to these parents. He noticed the nervous, enquiring look in Mrs. Downes's eyes : "What sort of person is this tall boy to whose care I am entrusting my son ? "

He smiled to himself as he saw Captain Norwich come over towards him, obviously about to try to secure a favourable prejudice for his boy with this august Captain of the House.

"This your first year as head boy ? "

"Yes," said Tony, politely but unhelpfully.

It was not he, this time, that had to struggle for conversation. If certain of these parents could not find things to say to him, they would feel that it was their own funeral. His was the advantage now ; and he did not stoop to scrambling for topical remarks.

"You play football all this term, I suppose ? "

"Yes," said Tony coldly.

In the intervals of genteel conversation, he ran a critical eye over the new boys themselves. He wondered how many of them would prove to have been Captains of Cricket at their prep. schools - (all new boys, or nearly all, were Captains of Cricket at their prep. schools) - and how many of these ex-captains would be cricketers.

At last Jennings indicated to the new boys that they might go across to the other part of the House. The parents made their ingratiating farewells.

"Good-bye, Mr. Jennings, and many thanks. Good-bye, Mr. - er - Roretton."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Roretton. So glad to have met you." Captain Norwich, with virility: "Well, good-bye, Roretton. Best of luck for the year."

When they had all gone, Jennings took Tony aside into his study.

"I'm afraid, Roretton, that you won't have Canning to help you this year."

"Really, sir?"

"No. I'm sorry to say he's left. His father wanted him to stay on, but . . ." Jennings paused. "Well, anyhow, he's left. Still, I expect you can make do all right with four monitors."

"Oh, yes, sir. I think so." Canning left! Tony was amazed. Could it be because of that business at the end of last term?

"I don't think," Jennings continued, "that you ought to have much trouble this year. Mathews may be a difficulty. He's a bit of a rebel, I think. Too old to be here as a commoner, really. But I couldn't make him a monitor. He doesn't know the meaning of the word 'discipline,' and," he added ruefully, "he doesn't even know how to spell it."

Tony smiled.

"Well, all right, Roretton, I won't keep you any longer. But I'm sorry about Canning," he added.

And with slightly awkward greetings to fags and twoers Tony's first day as Captain of the House came to an end. Tony was determined to be a reformer as well as an administrator. Fortunately, all his monitors were ready to back him up. Within the first week of term he had convened an assembly of the House, and given them a jaw on 'Language' - a difficult task for a boy to his contemporaries.

"There may be some excuse," he had said, "for spontaneous swearing - for instance, when you break something or drop something on your foot. But the habit of

flinging obscene words about casually simply because there is nothing better to do - that is unpleasant and unnecessary. And that habit I do not propose to allow."

This spirit of general reformation had a marked effect on the character of Tony himself. For, although he was ruled inwardly, to a marked extent, by enthusiasm and even by melodrama, he very seldom gave any outward sign of enjoyment - far less of enthusiasm. Now, therefore, he deliberately set out to cultivate an excitement on the matter of rugger. It was further necessary, he considered, to manifest a certain dignity. Accordingly, he took an unwonted trouble to dress smartly, or at least neatly. In compensation, he derived a new and considerable pleasure from walking down to school with his back very straight, and incurring looks of devout respect from small boys in very new straw hats. But the attraction of these meanderings began to wear off with their novelty, and Tony became gradually oblivious of the fact that he was a 'blood.'

One evening during prep., Tony was walking along the top passage when he heard oaths resounding from Mathews's study. He opened the door and went in.

"Surely you know that you mayn't make a noise in prep., Mathews, and that you're not allowed to use that sort of language at any time?"

"I wasn't swearing particularly loud," said Mathews sullenly.

"You were swearing audibly," said Tony. "Come and see me after prayers, please."

Tony closed the door quietly.

After prayers, Mathews did not appear. Tony sent Downes to fetch him.

A minute later Mathews walked truculently into the room.

"Why didn't you come without having to be fetched?"

"I forgot," said Mathews surlily.

"Well, I propose to beat you for using unnecessarily obscene language."

Mathews started. The idea of being beaten had not occurred to him.

"But . . . aren't you giving me an option? I came the same term as you, you know."

"I'm not interested in when you came," said Tony coldly. "Put your head under the table, please."

Mathews stood still.

"Put your head under the table or appeal now to Jennings."

Slowly Mathews put his head under the table.

Tony took up the cane. He gave Mathews four hard, dispassionate strokes.

"Thank you. That'll do, Mathews."

Mathews got up and pulled his coat down. He walked out, very red in the face. Tony smiled round at Beaumont and Skaine. He had not taken the slightest pleasure in beating Mathews. But he was wonderfully glad that Mathews had been beaten.

The House thought Mathews's beating rather 'scandalous.' But did it matter very much what the House thought? It did matter a certain amount what people like Mr. Kitson thought; but to Tony the ultimate criterion was his own considered opinion. It was nothing to him that the House applauded one of his actions, if he wasn't satisfied with it himself. He was not in the least disturbed that all the fags in the House were holding indignation-meetings because of Mathews's beating, since he himself was satisfied that the beating was just, or, at least, expedient. It had been the same with cricket. He had not responded to the applause of spectators for a lucky fifty; and when the crowd was groaning quietly,

as he returned from the wicket after his third successive failure, he was by no means down-hearted. He had been unlucky; that was all. And he had discovered that the moment of failure or success was hardly ever that recognised as such by the world.

He took great pleasure, too, in reading the lesson; although the first time that he did it he had been rather nervous. During the psalm he had been seized with a presentiment that he was going to trip up over the chancel steps. He had gone up to the lectern a bit too early; and had started reading before the people had got entirely settled down in their seats. Gradually he became more confident.

"Let us now praise famous men and their fathers before them." Slowly the coughing diminished and the shuffling of feet became inaudible. He was getting it across. He became a little theatrical, a little over-emphatic. But he knew by the silence that he was holding the chapel.

He finished. Coughing broke out afresh. He looked down at the rows of eyes upturned to him. He began to walk down the steps. Suddenly he remembered that he had forgotten to say, "Here endeth the lesson." As he walked into his place, he laughed quietly to the boy next him. What did it matter?

When the Headmaster began to preach, Tony forgot all about his omission.

2

After a fortnight Tony went to see Mr. Jennings on a rather delicate matter; but a matter on which he had talked so much during the past year that he would have to go through with it now.

Mr. Jennings was unfortunately rather busy when Tony

went into the study. Still, as a favour, he would hear what his Captain had to say.

Tony was embarrassed. He could not think of a way to begin. Mr. Jennings began to tap the side of the table with his pencil.

Tony plunged. "It is about House prayers, sir."

Mr. Jennings nodded. "Well?" he said.

"Well, I'm not quite sure, sir," Tony began, "whether it's my business to make the suggestion. But I think that I ought to tell you, sir, that there is a strong feeling in the House that it would be better not to have the same prayers every night of the year."

Mr. Jennings shifted about on his chair.

"I must admit that you rather surprise me," he said with all the tolerance he could summon. "I have used these same prayers in the House every evening for five years and there has never been a complaint of this sort before, Roretton."

Tony hesitated. "I shouldn't like you to think of it as a complaint, sir," he said at last. "Only I felt that it was up to me to tell you that certain people feel it almost impossible to concentrate on the prayers, and that nearly everyone is tired of 'O God, our help.'"

Mr. Jennings fumbled for his spectacles.

"There should be no difficulty in concentration, really," he declared. "Quite apart from House prayers, I have used the same manual for five years in my private devotions."

"Well, sir," said Tony, "the priest who prepared me for confirmation told me on no account to use the same prayers for two weeks running. And I know of others as well..."

"Quite unnecessary," cut in Mr. Jennings. "And I'm afraid I can't alter the present arrangements for prayers, Roretton."

As the term went on, Tony showed himself a capable

Captain of the House; although it is at the end of the summer term that the ultimate test of Captaincy commonly occurs, when everyone is tired and a little jaded, and discipline grows comfortably lax, and sentiment insinuates itself into the most material mentality.

3

It was in November, when Tony was gaining some prestige as an ethical and moral reformer, that a message came from Richardson, the Captain of the School, to attend a meeting of school prefects.

Tony arrived rather late in the prefects' common-room that evening, to find the other prefects, twelve in number, already assembled. There was an atmosphere of forced gravity in the room; it seemed rather as though all these people had come in late after football, and had had no time to put their dignities on properly. Tony apologised, and hoped that he had not kept them all waiting; and the Captain of the School (whom the Head had selected for soundness rather than for enterprise) went on to explain the business in hand.

It was the old story of a note that had been picked up, considered suspicious, and handed over to the Captain of the House.

"This note," Richardson was saying, a little pompously, "is of a certain type which it is unnecessary to particularise, a type which has always been recognised as detrimental to the tone and general welfare of the school. It was written by a three-er in the Hall to an all but new boy, who, I am told is in Jennings's."

"My own strong personal feeling on the matter is that this is an excellent opportunity for an exemplary punishment of the boy in the Hall, whose general reputation is, I think, bad."

"I therefore propose that we administer a prefection to the boy in question. But, before taking a ballot on the matter, I should be glad to hear the views of Roretton, in whose House I gather that this younger boy is ; and I should also like to know if anyone wishes to propose an amendment to the punishment suggested ?"

"May I ask," said Tony, "what is the difference in the ages between these two boys ?"

"Three and a half years, Roretton," said Richardson.

"And may I ask," Tony continued, "whether the tone of this note was merely romantic, or definitely immoral ?"

"Definitely immoral," said Richardson decidedly.

"Then I should definitely advocate an immediate prefection," Tony said.

"Very well," Richardson continued. "Is there any amendment ? No ? Then I will give you the names of the two boys ; and if you think that they both deserve beating, write down both names ; if only the elder, write down his. And I would like to remind everyone that for the result of the ballot to be accepted it must be unanimous."

As Tony folded his piece of ballot-paper in half, he wondered vaguely who the young boy in his House was ; for that matter, who the other boy was. He hoped that he would not know him, would not have heard of him before. Poor devil ! Still, he was a damned fool to put anything down on paper.

"The name of the younger boy," Richardson was saying, "is Hodgkiss ; the name of the younger is Hodgkiss."

Hodgkiss ! An unlikely sort of person, Tony would have said.

". . . and of the elder," Richardson's voice droned on, "Mortimer."

"Mortimer !" Why, he was in Jennings's, and a friend

of Tony's. He had only come a year after him. It was absurd, incredible.

"What was the last name, please, Richardson ?"

"Mortimer, Roretton."

So it was Mortimer. Mortimer, the least physical, the most spiritualised person he knew.

It was impossible. The situation was ludicrous.

And Richardson was still speaking. "I think," he was muttering, "that the prefection of such a prominent person as Mortimer should have a most beneficial moral effect on the school."

Oh ! It was impossible ! Tony could not assist at this hypocrisy. But he could not speak now. The discussion was closed. Still, he would not, he could not, vote for it.

Richardson was coming round for the papers. Quickly he wrote 'Neither' across the paper, and folded it. Really, this was hell's own situation.

They were reading the votes now.

"Mortimer - Mortimer - Mortimer - Mortimer - Mortimer - Mortimer - Mortimer . . . what's this ? Neither !" Richardson stopped counting. "There is one dissentient opinion," he said. "I must remind everyone of the rule which insists on a ballot such as this being unanimous - if it is to be acted upon."

There was a pause, during which each prefect looked suspiciously at his neighbour. Tony shivered ; he could feel the eyes of all converging and focusing themselves accusingly on him. Oh ! why did he ever wish to be a prefect ? He felt so weak, so powerless, now.

"I shall take a second and last ballot." The voice of Richardson jarred horribly.

In an instant it seemed that the ballot-papers were collected.

"The voting is now unanimous," Richardson was saying.

Automatically, or so it seemed, Mortimer came into the room. Did he admit it? Oh, yes, yes, yes, he admitted it.

A chair was put in position. Tony gazed distractedly at the boy; and there came home to him the recollection of far clocks striking, and the Round, and a winter sky beneath the twilight. But the arts of Keats were not unaccomplished.

The chair was in position.

"Bend over, please."

Richardson took up the cane and fingered the end of it. To the other prefects: "Follow on quickly."

"Bend further over."

Two quick steps. A sweep of the cane. Richardson handed it to Formby, who was left-handed. He swung it ferociously, a practised, vibrating stroke. It was Tony's turn next. The cane sprang out of Formby's hands, and fell, with a rattle, on the bare wood floor. As Tony stooped to pick it up, he heard one of the junior prefects snigger. The sound maddened him. He raised the stick and brought it through cruelly hard. He handed it to Giles. Turning, he caught a glimpse of Mortimer's face, twisted by sudden, unexpected pain. He went and stood by the window numbly.

One. Two. Three. Four. He counted the remaining strokes. Remotely, he heard Richardson's "Thank you."

Faintly, the utterance of compressed lips. A door was opening and shutting. A chair was being slid back against a wall.

Tony walked out into the honest air. Out of the distance, out of the mist, Richardson was thanking him for his co-operation! Somewhere else Formby was thinking loudly that this was the best thing that had been done for some time. But Tony did not hear them. For his ears

were being scalded by the fierce reproachfulness of *Liebesträume*; and his eyes were filled with a vision of wet pavements beneath a winter sky, and kindly fogs lapping upward from the dear grass of the Round.

On Saturday morning he received a letter from his mother to the effect that she had just had an invitation for him from the Currays; and, they being such nice people, she had accepted for him. Tony was miserable. More embarrassment! More introductions! More scrambling for conversation! More strange girls to dance with; and more strange butlers to tip!

Mercifully, Mr. Kitson had asked him to tea that afternoon. And one could talk without reserve to Mr. Kitson.

Tony was determined to find relief somewhere.

"What do you think about the prefection of Mortimer, sir?" he said, as he dropped the third lump of sugar into his cup.

"That," said Mr. Kitson, "is one of the few subjects on which I beg leave to reserve my judgment. The thing, of course, hangs on whether it was really a romantic friendship or an immoral attachment."

"Yes, sir; but why don't all masters recognise that distinction?"

"My dear Roretton, I'm not a housemaster. It's a brave housemaster who attempts to sanction, or even encourage, the one, and stamp out the other. And my experience is that such a man, though doubtless highly to be admired, generally has a bad House."

"You mean that it's hard for him to draw the line between the two?"

"Very. But I should have thought that you fellows could have made a pretty accurate diagnosis. And yet I believe that you diagnosed that Mortimer business wrong."

"Yes," said Tony grimly.

" You see, the housemaster who tries to make the distinction is, as it were, importing rabbits into Australia. But prefects can do no such harm."

" All the same, sir, it's not easy for us to draw the line."

" But it's easier for you than it is for us. Partly because of the official attitude towards the David and Jonathan system, and partly because of the horror which one's aunts and colonel-uncles would experience on hearing that anything like love between boy and boy was countenanced."

" I know, sir. Why is it that that sort of people loves an opportunity for crying ' Unnatural ! Immoral ! ? ' "

" Because, Roretton, what aunts and club-bound colonels are pleased to call their ' minds ' consist largely of cant, and of the undigested opinions of great-aunts and club-bound generals. Also, because they have not, as yet, got the taste of Oscar Wilde out of their well-bred mouths. Also, because they have taken good care not to let *their* children read *The Loom of Youth*."

" But surely, sir, the case of Wilde has nothing whatever to do with this. His attachments were not friendships ; and they were quite other than romantic."

" Exactly," said Mr. Kitson ; " besides, he was a grown man. The romantic friendship is essentially an attribute of youth. I believe that it is not only natural, but normal, for a Public School boy to make his first discovery of the thing called love through the existence of another boy. After all, after the age of fifteen, love will out ; and as eligible female beings are not encouraged in the precincts of Public Schools, what can you expect ? I was interested to read, the other day, in an essay by a Church of England thinker, that early youth makes no distinction between the sexes ; that what may be perversion in a man of forty is natural in a boy of seventeen."

Tony smiled. " Sounds like propaganda for co-education, doesn't it ? " he said.

" Or," replied Mr. Kitson, " a plea for complete and (apparently) impossible honesty on the part of all boys and all masters."

" Then don't you think, sir, that someone should come forward and cry from the housetops that all friendships that are romantic are not, for that reason, immoral ; and that the love of boy for boy is the natural prelude to the love of man for woman ? "

" Yes, I think that someone should."

" I think that one day I shall write a book about it."

" I should." Mr. Kitson smiled. " And the reviewers will say : ' I would as soon administer to my young son a double portion of arsenic as give him this book to read.' "

" But ordinary people — would they believe it ? "

" I suppose those who have had experience of it would. And they . . . "

" Would probably maintain a conventional silence ? "

" Exactly, Roretton."

" And yet the Greeks recognised it."

" Certainly."

" Plato . . . for instance."

" Ah, yes ; but that is a little different. What Plato meant was sympathy love, and we were talking about passion love."

" Yes, sir, but I know from experience that even sympathy love has periodical fits of passion love."

" I see. Like a volcano."

" Yes. That's rather a good parallel."

" And wherein, would you say, lies the birth of this passion love ? "

" I should say that it lies in the transition from the contemplation of a pretty face to the worship of something higher."

"Something higher?"

"Yes, sir. A something higher which I, for one, have felt; which I know to be beautiful, and think to be sacred."

Mr. Kitson smiled at the unconscious melodrama of this utterance.

"Another cup of tea?" he said.

When Tony arrived back that evening in Captain's study, he found a letter awaiting him.

"I apologise, Tony," he read. "Although I'm not convinced that I was in the wrong, I realise that it may have been having a bad effect on other people."

"If you'd care to be friendly again, would you care to play fives some time?"

"Yours ever,
JACK M."

"Thank God for that!" said Tony.

And what was this? Another note? He tore it open. An invitation from Ronny for two dances after Christmas. It would clash with the invitation from his mother's nice friends. Ah, well, he had not accepted yet. He would go to the Bantons. He would choose the devil he knew.

XIX

NIRVANA

I

TONY arrived home. His father had arranged the big covert shoot for the day after his arrival. Tony was flustered. Here he was in a state of agitation about going to the Bantons' on Boxing Day, and he would now have to go out and talk about the crops to sportsmen.

"Not a good day for shooting, is it, Lewis?" he remarked as Lewis drew the curtains the next morning.

"I fancy it will become brighter, sir. The glass is going up nicely."

"Oh."

"Will you be wearing your brown plus fours, sir?"

"Er - well - I don't know so much about plus fours. I don't think the weather is fit for shooting."

Lewis smoothed out the pair of stockings which he was holding and laid them across the arm of the chair.

"Sir Francis, sir, is getting up in his shooting-clothes."

"Oh, all right, Lewis. Very well."

Tony turned over and drew the bedclothes above his ears.

The day, Tony reflected when he arrived back home that evening, had been a good one. They had killed seventy-three brace of pheasants and six woodcock.

On Boxing Day he was to go to the Bantons. He was to travel in his school blue suit. Tony had protested on

the grounds that Ronny would think that he had only one suit. But her ladyship had been adamant.

" You must *arrive* looking respectable," she had said.

She little knew what sort of people he was going to stay with. " Quite impossible people" they would perhaps have been to her ; but to Tony the idea of the guests that they might possibly have invited besides himself held something of terror. And, as he laid his tail-coat tenderly on the top of the box, he wondered what on earth he was going to talk about to these (possibly) bright young people.

Next morning he awoke suddenly as Lewis walked into his room. Well, he was in for it now. Porters requiring nicely graded tips ; strange chauffeurs expecting to be spoken to in that distinctive tone of cordial lordliness ; butlers - Tony was obsessed by butlers - butlers condescending to take his coat ; real *grandes dames*, perhaps, introducing their modern daughters ; arriving in the ball-room undistinguished among distinguished people ; and finally - dancing ! When it rains, it surely storms.

Why, oh, why, hadn't he had those dancing lessons ?

2

Ronny Banton met him at the station. Tony was glad of that. He was puzzled, however, to notice how different Ronny's nature seemed now that Ronny was wearing plus fours.

" We've only a small party, Tony. In fact, we're only going five to the two balls. You and Helen and mummy and myself and another girl - Monica Sale."

" Oh ! Splendid."

Tony's fears of potentially bright young people were now concentrated in the single person of Monica Sale. The car drew up, and Tony was surprised to see that the

house was quite small and suburban. Tony got out of the car and looked about him. The prospect all but suggested the residential quarter of Epstead ; but the inside of the house was more promising. It was tastefully if cautiously decorated in stained wood and cream-coloured walls - essentially a modern house, convenient and comfortable. Tony could not help comparing it with the fatuous, dignified, and wasteful spaciousness of Burnans.

Mrs. Banton was sitting by a pseudo-antique brick hearth. She greeted Tony pleasantly and unaffectedly.

" How are you, Mr. Roretton ? This is Miss Monica Sale. And you know Helen, don't you ? "

Fortunately Tony stepped into his least shy rôle. He shook hands boldly with Mrs. Banton, and remembered not to try to shake hands with the other guests.

Helen began to pour out tea.

" Come and eat," she said.

Tony sat down at the table.

" I've been hearing so much about you from Ronny," she remarked, handing him a cup of tea.

Tony felt rather pleased.

" Really ? " he said. " But how embarrassing."

" Yes," Helen continued, " you write poetry."

" Oh, but I don't really," Tony laughed.

" Oh, but you do," Monica broke in emphatically.

Tony looked from one girl to the other. They were a queer contrast. Helen, white and Ophelian ; Monica, dark and with something of the Assyrian princess about her.

Ronny came into the room. He had been putting away the car.

" Well, Ronny," said Mrs. Banton, " I am going to rest a little. Will you look after everyone ? "

Ronny led them into the nursery. He put on the gramophone. It was not very necessary for Tony to talk

to Monica ; and certainly it was not in the least difficult. Tony wanted to know about the ball. It was the County ball, it appeared - rather a smart show. Evidently, thought Tony, the Bantons are 'accepted' in this county. Strange ! Yet perhaps not strange. Perhaps it was only round Burnans that it was essential for the grandfather and not the father to have made the money. Perhaps, after all, it was not such a mistake on the part of Ronny's father to have made a fortune out of canned food.

Helen said, " I suppose we'd better go and dress."

" Yes," said Monica. " We're getting there early, Tony, so that Ronny can introduce you and me to all the good-lookers."

Tony laughed. How charming this dark, Oriental-looking girl was. A kind of boyish friendship was already beginning between them. Tony could feel it.

3

They did indeed get to the ball early. And, though Tony was a little dazzled by the number of pink coats, he was relieved to find that nobody found his presence extraordinary ; more, that when people trod on his toe they apologised lavishly, evidently labouring under the delusion that unless he were Somebody he would not be there. And Tony felt hardly at all embarrassed when Helen introduced him to her various female friends. It was so simple, that formula : " Have you a dance left ? " and everyone seemed to find him quite ordinary.

The band struck up the first extra. Monica took Tony by the arm.

" You're going to have this with me," she said.

Really, it almost seemed that Monica, and not Helen, was the daughter of his hostess, so quickly had they come to understand each other. And Tony found that he

wasn't dancing so badly ; no, not so badly at all. He saw Ronny standing among the group in the doorway. He wondered whether he were trespassing with Monica. He caught Ronny's eye : saw him smile. Tony laughed. He was glad that he had got five dances with Monica. She was so charmingly natural ; devoid of affectation, devoid of studied politeness. Besides, she talked so helpfully.

The second dance Tony had booked with Helen. Helen was charming, too, but in a more delicate way. Fresh, white, medieval, and with happy blue eyes. She, too, was easy to talk to ; especially as she enjoyed discussing people. Tony mentioned Mr. Kitson, who had twice been to stay with the Bantons.

" What did you think of him ? Rather odd ? "

Helen hesitated. " No," she said slowly. " I liked him."

" Not much, though ? "

Helen laughed. She said : " I just liked him."

" Just like that ? "

Helen nodded : changed the subject.

And the evening wore on easily. Supper came ; and Tony, in his eagerness to show that he was no greenhorn, took a trifle too much champagne for the maintenance of a perfect equilibrium ; and, when he rose to go into the ballroom for the fifteenth dance, he was shocked to find that his hip knocked clumsily against the edge of the table. In fact, it was a relief to get into the car and start the ten-mile drive home. He looked at his watch. Half-past three. No wonder Mrs. Banton had gone home early. Even so, there was none too much room in the car, as they were giving a lift to one Eric Cardew, who lived in the next house to the Bantons. Ronny, who had enjoyed himself that evening not in Monica's company alone, sat in front. Monica herself had insisted on sitting

on the floor near Tony's feet. Tony and the Cardew man occupied the two corners. Between them – but not so much on Tony's side as the other – sat, or rather reclined, Helen. Mr. Cardew, who had manifestly taken sufficient champagne, embarked upon a semi-humorous monologue. Gradually Tony felt Monica's head subside in sleep upon his knees. And instinctively in that moment he knew that Helen's left hand, which lay covered with the rug, was held firm in Mr. Cardew's probably perspiring fingers.

Well, he dared say that they were enjoying it. After all, it must be rather fun to hold a girl's hand.

4

At long last the car drew up, and decanted its weary humanity into the porch. Tony helped himself to a whisky and soda, and balanced it and him on the arm of the sofa.

The girls were going up the stairs to bed. Half way up, Helen turned and looked over the banisters. She seemed rather dishevelled in the dim light of the chandelier. A strand of hair was trailing aimlessly down her left cheek.

"Good night," she said. "Good night."

"Good night," Tony called back.

He drank off the rest of his whisky and soda.

Slowly he walked up the stairs, and went into his bedroom. Why, he was wondering, had she said 'Good night' like that.

5

Tony's personality fluctuated between two diametrically opposite poles. Before he had established his position in a certain circle of people, his morbid

self-consciousness made him obsessed with the idea to appear ordinary ; but, once he had found his assurance in that particular society, his dramatic sense demanded that he should be different and distinctive.

One night of dancing with ample refreshments will do more to bring strangers close together than weeks and months of tea-and-dinner talks. And Tony was filled with an ambition that is born only of unbounded assurance, when he came down at twelve o'clock next morning to breakfast. There was no ball that night ; but the County Scout Ball was to be held the night after.

At breakfast he sat next to Monica and opposite Helen. Monica talked rather too much for that hour of the morning ; and Tony had a headache of which he was heartily ashamed. "Headaches" – he remembered his father's *cliche* – "come from bad champagne or too much champagne." And everyone last night had been loud in their praises of the Pol Roger '17.

God, though ! how marvellous Helen looked this morning. What an amazingly fresh complexion she had ! And those lips – that full, rather seductive underlip. So engrossed was Tony in gazing at the rich curve of her small mouth that he did not realise for some seconds that she was speaking to him.

"Did you dream well ?" she repeated.

"Marvellously," said Tony, without knowing in the least what he was saying. "I dreamt about you."

Helen smiled. "But how nice for you," she said.

"It was," said Tony earnestly, and turned immediately red. What on earth was he saying ? He was drivelling. Drivelling. He turned to Monica.

"What are we going to do to-day ?" he asked.

"Don't know," she answered. "How about golf, Helen ?"

"Yes," said Tony absently. He had not heard her

answer. He was looking at Helen's eyes. Why ! they were perfect. Perfect.

6

After 'breakfast,' Monica took Tony out to play with Helen's new mashie. Ronny went to the garage. Helen had a letter to write.

It was amusing being alone with Monica. One could talk to her rather as he was used to talk to Ronny. But Tony was not playing golf very well. He was bringing his hands through in front of the ball again. Still, it didn't matter.

"I say," he said at last, "I do admire that necklace of yours."

Monica laughed. "Do you?" she said. "You'll never guess who gave it to me?"

"Oh ! do tell me," said Tony automatically. He didn't want to know.

"I'll play truths with you," said Monica in her best 'naughty' tone.

"Well, you can safely advance me one truth till tomorrow," said Tony.

"D'you promise?" said Monica.

"Of course," said Tony. "Now tell me."

"Eric Cardew."

"Oh," said Tony dully. "Oh, him."

"Yes," laughed Monica, "him."

They played back to the house, and found tea already laid in the hall.

It was the same again. Tony found himself staring helplessly at Helen's lips. In a detached way, he told himself, he found them very good to look upon. Yes. Yes. But was it, after all, in such a very detached way? Was it?

"You're very silent, Tony" - Monica's voice burst in on him.

"Yes," said Tony, "I wasn't constructed to eat and talk simultaneously."

He sank back into his trance. The terrible question was : Was it merely a detached way? Damn it, the time had come to be, for once, honest with himself. Did he confess it or did he not?

Yes. They were marvellous lips. How superb to kiss them! How wonderful to be kissed by them!

Tony pulled himself together. He was being utterly stupid. Of course, it was impossible.

He became suddenly aware of cups and saucers and the sulphurous smell of fresh-lighted matches. They were going into the nursery.

"Coming, Tony?"

Was it? Could it be . . . ?

No, it was Monica's voice.

All the time till the dressing-gong went Monica played the gramophone; and with an effort Tony put this strange new idea temporarily from his mind.

At dinner he sat next Helen. For the entire meal she talked to him charmingly about nothing; but he wondered why she never allowed her eyes to look at him. And again the old obsession came back to Tony: what marvellous lips!

How heavenly to kiss them! How heavenly! The ladies left the dinner-table. Thoughtfully he sipped his port. He was struggling to be honest with himself. Surely, this was excellent port. He sipped it again. He glanced at Ronny: at Mr. Banton.

Perhaps I might! - brutally and plainly the thought struck him - perhaps I might! - perhaps I might!

No, no, no, no. Hurriedly he snuffed out the tantalising thought. It was absurd. He hardly knew her.

"Shall we join the ladies?"

Ronnie and he went into the nursery.

To the tune of 'The best things in life are free' Monica and Helen were dancing together.

Tony stood for a moment in the doorway. There! Definitely, distinctly, Helen looked at him; looked at him and smiled.

Perhaps I might! Perhaps I might! The record scratched itself to death. Helen came up to him.

"Come and dance with me," she said.

Tony's heart fluttered with joy. Self-consciously, the fingers of his left hand closed over hers. She was looking him very firmly in the eyes. Faintly, faintly, a smile hovered, beckoned, was gone.

And suddenly, far down in Tony's heart, the spirit of hope was born. The slightest encouragement, the thinnest suspicion of hope, will often breed a most devouring passion.

"You dance uniquely," Tony heard her say.

"Is that a compliment?" he asked.

And very distantly came her answer:

"Not exactly; merely an expression of pleasure."

Lyrically, exultantly, the thought returned. Perhaps I might! Perhaps I might! Perhaps I might!

They were going to bed early to-night. He must be honest. He must be honest. He must confess - to himself, at least. Did he admit it?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

"I love her." Oh! how could he stop himself telling the world that he loved her? Could he, at least, stop himself telling Ronny?

"I love her." "Can I attract her?" "Oh, she is perfect! And I love her; I love her so."

It was an hour of torment; but there were rewards....

"There, she looked at me. Did she? I wonder. Yes, of course she did. There! Again! Again! Again!"

Look! she was going up the stairs. Would she turn and glance? Would she? No...no. Ah! There. She was smiling to him:

"Good night." Did she say it? Or was it her smile?

"Good night."

Madly, joyously, Tony ran up the stairs to his room. Should he tell Ronny? Had Ronny noticed?

No. He would not tell him; and he must not notice. At least, not yet.

"She loves me! She loves me! She loves me!" he cried to himself.

Very quickly he undressed and tumbled into bed. He was so happy, so wonderfully happy; and not a little proud. At last he had come to experience that fierce and devouring passion for which he had known so long that he was being reserved.

7

At about ten o'clock next morning the maid came into his room. A little reluctantly he forced himself to wake up. He remembered. She loved him. The girl with the lips that he longed to kiss. She loved him. Yes.

But did she? Was he sure? Was he dead certain? It was so hard to remember. Perhaps...was it possible? Perhaps he had read too much into those ravishing glances? Perhaps his reasoning was at fault?

Anyhow, it was better to go back to the old safe enjoyments. Yes, it would be safer....Slowly he got up and dressed. All breakfast he kept himself from looking at Helen; though, at least twice, he knew that she glanced at him.

After breakfast he sat down to read some of that Rupert RP

Brooke that was oddly enough lying on the table. But even that seemed flat. Suddenly Tony realised what had happened. The old enjoyments were now non-existent. They simply were not.

From the other side of the room Helen glanced at him. No. He could not go back — there was nothing to go back to.

Well, he would go forward.

There ! She glanced again. She loved him ! How stupid he had been. Of course she loved him !

In a whirl of glances and self-confessions the day flashed by. And all day he hardly spoke a word to Ronny.

Once more he stood in the lobby of the Guildhall and watched the men in pink coats manipulating their programmes.

He strolled casually up to Helen.

"How many are you sparing me ? "

"As many as you like."

Tony hesitated. Was she joking ? Or could she mean it ? He must not be too rash. She would be annoyed.

"At least five."

She glanced at him curiously, enquiringly. She said : "But certainly."

The band began to play 'A room with a view — and you.'

"May I have the extra ? " he asked.

"I'd love it."

*A room with a view
And you,
And no one to worry us,
No one to hurry us . . .*

It was a wonderful tune, that ; and to-night it seemed to have a most particular meaning.

*And sorrow will never come —
True —
A room with a view.*

"I say, Tony," she called after him, as he left her to find his partner for the first, "you couldn't spare me one more, could you ? Pardon the breach of etiquette."

"But of course," answered Tony delightedly. "Whereabouts on the card ? "

"After supper, d'you think ? " Smiling : "How about the fifteenth ? "

"Marvellous ! " ("A room with a view ! ")

Tony danced the third with Monica.

As soon as the music stopped, they went and sat in the gallery.

"I have a request to make," Monica announced.

"Granted," said Tony at once. Would he not grant anything to-night ?

Monica smiled triumphantly.

She said : "I demand that truth you owe me."

"Oh, I say. . . ."

"Yes, I demand it."

"Oh, but"

"Come on !" Severely : "It's almost time for the next dance."

Tony was pleased. He said : "Well, if you must have it, I'll tell you. I think Helen is the most perfect girl I've ever met."

Monica pouted.

She said : "I don't think much of that. That means nothing."

The band gave a preliminary moan : became suddenly loud.

"Do you think so ? " Walking away : "Well, you can take it from me that it means the hell of a lot."

The next dance that Tony had with Monica was the ninth - the one before supper. A slow foxtrot - 'Chloe.' In mid-floor Monica stopped : said abruptly :

"Tony, I believe you said less than you meant just now."

"Did I?"

"You really meant that you were in love with Helen?"

"What else?"

Monica smiled gladly into his eyes.

"Oh, Tony," she said, "I'm so frightfully happy for you."

The Bantons' party went in to supper together ; and this time Tony was careful not to allow Monica to fill his glass whenever she felt so inclined.

The first dance after supper was with Helen. How superb it was to feel her so terribly near to him, with their knees hungrily though respectfully close and their fingers intimately but legitimately entwined. It fevered him, this quivering of her flesh against his body. Tony became ecstatic, physical.

She smiled at him a dizzy smile of pleasure - a smile that had been stolen at midnight from pools of mirth in distant Ophir. With what inspiration she moved ! She did not dance ; she was Motion, divine, superb, compelling, mellowed with laughter and spiced with passion. Fascinated, Tony danced on, lost in the quiet magic of her voice and eyes. The music stopped and they ran - yes, ran - for the most secluded of the sitting-out rooms. They chose the sofa. Tony felt Helen's leg pressed eagerly against his ; oh, it was splendid, rapturous.

She was saying : "I wonder whether there is a single man in this drab room that I shall see again."

Quietly, Tony laughed. He said : "I expect you'll end up by marrying someone in this room."

"Do you think so?"

"Probably." He added : "I'll tell you for certain if you allow me to tell your fortune. No ; the right hand, please."

He took her hand in his : bent his head over it, secretly. He smiled. A lofty, omniscient smile.

"Tell me," she said.

Tony shook his head.

"The information is worth hundreds."

"I'll give you millions."

He said softly : "It's worth more than millions." More softly : "It's worth a kiss."

"Give me an hour or two's credit ; tell me."

Tony laughed : exulted.

"On those terms, I have to tell you that it's just as we feared, and sooner or later you'll marry some fellow in this room."

She withdrew her hand slowly. She said : "Fraud."

"Perhaps," he laughed, "but you must keep your word, even to a fraud. *Noblesse oblige.*"

Later. Ronny came up to Tony and said :

"Mother's rather tired, so we're going home with Monica. Will you and Helen follow us on later in the limousine ?"

Tony nodded : smiled.

It was too good, much too good, to be true.

An hour and a half later Tony helped Helen into the limousine. Vaguely he thought of Eric Cardew and his perspiring fingers. What did it matter ? She was his now.

The car swung out of the crowd of women in rich cloaks, out of the lights and the far noise of the band, into the sleeping town.

"Oughtn't we to have this light out ?" said Tony.

"It makes it so hard for the man to drive." He spoke loudly, that his reputable meaning might not be distorted or misunderstood.

"My dear, you mustn't talk so loud," she whispered, as the light went out. Who had done that? thought Tony. It was not he. And then he saw that her arm had stolen across him and turned off the switch at his right side. And on the black rug which lay across his knees the frail white hand had lingered. Somehow it had got left behind; perhaps she had forgotten to pick it up. Poor little lonely hand, there it lay in front of him, requiring to be comforted.

Very gently, and very casually, his right hand closed over it. It became entirely lost among his fingers. Tenderly, caressingly, he squeezed it. And from far inside he felt a slight, imperceptible, answering pressure. Suddenly two small fingers wriggled out and entwined themselves with his. He squeezed them passionately; and his heart stood up in rapture as the distinct answer ran down the frailty of her fingers.

Is there any moment so wonderful as that when the woman of one's heart first returns the pressure of one's hand?

Softer, softer than the voices of the night, her voice breathed upon his ear.

"Yes," she was telling him, "you must not speak so loud. It is profane. Besides, the man will hear. You should speak like this."

And her crooning voice rose and fell and wound itself at last into the slow purring of the engine. Now it was indistinguishable. The words were lost. He knew only that she was whispering most terribly to him.

Many times had he felt the tune of some unsubstantial song running in his head for a day or for a week. But not till that night did he know what it was to have a rhythm

such as that wound into his very being; echoing, throbbing in his brain, and tangled up in his self. Terribly close now and insistent, no song, but a rhythm of great richness, so near and so terribly directed towards him alone, so enchanting and so soothing, rising and falling as the purring of the engine rose and fell. If he had ever known magic, he knew it in that hour — with her still hand in his hand, and her rich voice in his heart. Slowly her voice took him wholly and with infinite peace to itself. And he lay back triumphantly against the cushions, and the engine crooned on smoothly and with the power of a river, and he knew of nothing but the voice as it seemed claiming him magnetically for its slave.

And then Helen suddenly spoke.

"I think I shall go to sleep now," she said. Tony was wounded. That had been heaven. And it would be a pity to sleep through heaven.

"Really?" he asked gravely.

"I think so," she said.

And Tony's fear was turned suddenly to triumph; since, for the purposes of this sleep, she drew closer, ever so little closer to him. And the left side of his body flamed and tingled at her touch. And her head fell casually against his; and her small hand suddenly tightened.

And Tony was swept by an irresistible passion. Almost savagely he freed his right hand; and threw his right arm round her waist. And almost fiercely he drew her against him. And in an instant her lips singed his mouth. And he felt her whole weight on his arms, and her head fell back gently against the cushions.

And the car turned abruptly, and went a little way, and began to slow down.

For the last time he turned towards her. The warmth of her flesh ate into his side. The certain pressure of her breasts against his body maddened him. Never before

had he experienced physical passion. The touch of her hands intoxicated him. He was drunk with the fragrance of her hair.

Abruptly the car stopped.

From the small window above the door the yellow light licked the whiteness of her neck ; and fell upon her closed eyes and her red, half-open lips.

They were back in the world - in Epstead.

And, as he crawled into bed that night, Tony thanked God fervently for this great triumph. Everything now was fresh ; everything was magnificently alive ; everything was robed in a most glorious glamour.

"She loves me !" he laughed to himself. "She loves me !"

And on that thought he began to build the splendour of the future. Because of that it was all worth-while. There would be thrilling letters, and wonderful visits to Burnans, and the ever-new excitement of dances, and fresh, delirious tunes.

"What a future," he sighed, "what a marvellous future !"

And quite suddenly he fell asleep ; and the faces of the stars peered into his half-closed eyes, and the tired voices of the night breathed like hyssop upon his ears.

He awoke next morning with the thin winter sunlight streaming in upon his bed. The butler brought him breakfast in his room. And with a light heart he dressed and went downstairs. There was not much time to catch the train. Monica met him in the hall. He took his gloves from the table. There was a stamped letter on it. He glanced at the address.

'G. Kitson, Esq.'

How odd !

Monica whispered to him :

"She is staying in bed this morning. I told her last night after she came in, Tony. And she asked me to say good-bye to you ; and gave me this letter."

Tony felt a little disappointed. Still, there was the letter. . . . He glanced at it.

'Tony.

'Not to be opened till you are in the train.'

He put it in his pocket.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Banton," he said. "I've loved it."

"Good-bye, Monica."

"Good-bye, Tony ; and mind you let me hear. . . ."

"Good-bye, Ronny. Many thanks."

He got into the car. The December sun streamed in on him as he drove to the station. What would Helen have to say ? There would be a date, of course, and an invitation to write. . . .

He walked on to the platform. There was ten minutes to wait. Well, there couldn't be any harm in opening it now. Very reverently he tore open the envelope. There was no first line. Odd. . . .

'I'm sorry, Tony,' he read, 'I had no idea, till Monica told me last night, that you felt like that about me. I just thought that we'd had some delightful talks, and, perhaps, a pleasant little flirtation.'

'I'm dreadfully sorry, Tony. Because, as I'm sure you'll realise now, I don't feel a bit the same as you do. And, as I think it will hurt you less, I suggest that it would be better for you not to write or try to see me, for a bit, at least. Don't you agree really ?'

'I'm terribly, terribly sorry, Tony. But I don't see what's to be done except to implore you to cheer up and forget about this.'

'Yours,
HELEN.'

Tony felt the tears coming to his eyes. Hurriedly he walked to the end of the platform. At any rate the porters must not see. He could not speak ; he could hardly think. For the greatest grief is speechless.

His reasoning had been wrong ! The glances that he had supposed to mean love, had signified a mere flirtation. What a child was he ! Even that kiss. . . . The very idea on which he had built the future was false. There was nothing left to live for. Nothing.

Oh ! he felt so tired, so tired. Crumpled and broken, he sat down on a bench. And from the depths of his heart he prayed for death.

Everything was grey now ; everything was old ; everything was wrapped in an abysmal hopelessness. Grey and terrifying the train came in. Tony wished that he had the courage to throw himself in front of it. It was useless. He sat down in a corner seat. The woman opposite frightened him. Had she seen the tears in his eyes ?

Oh, heavens ! this was not an engine. This was God incarnate in metal. This was Fate ; Fate, inevitable, glad, merciless. Regardless of whether you throw yourself in front of it, regardless of fluttering handkerchiefs and hearts, regardless of sentiment and farewells, it goes upon its immutable course down the grey grooves of Destiny.

It is wonderful and terrible. It is the bearer of eager faces and of broken hearts. It runs through sunshine and

through rain. It streaks across the sunlit hills. It crawls through the valleys of the mist.

To-day the weather was poisonously bright. The sun shone in maddeningly. And there is nothing so tormentingly painful as a lovely morning when one's heart is out of harmony with it. Somehow, Tony felt, one is often in a train when one feels one's heart is broken.

He arrived home. How many years older was he now than when, three days ago, he had driven out of these gates.

"Well, dear, and how did you get on ? "

"Oh, I enjoyed it frightfully. And, mummy, incidentally, do you think I need go back to school next term, or at least not in the summer term ? "

"Of course you must, dear."

"Oh, please, mummy, please not. You can't think how much too old I am now."

And, for the rest of these tediously depressing holidays, Tony sat about in the smoking-room, nursing his bitter grievance against human nature ; and trying to forget that in an obscure market town in the remotest south, four hundred varying forms of dust and earth would be forgathering in a week's time, to be bound again by petty restrictions, to be spoken at again by begrooved pedants, and to feel again, most of them, such a crying need to love and be loved as could there never be adequately understood or satiated.

The last evening of the holidays, after the servants had withdrawn from the dining-room. Lady Moreton :

"We didn't tell you before, Tony, but while you were away poor old Lewis's son Cyril ran away with the girl from the post-office."

"Oh ? " said Tony impartially. "Are they happy ? "

"My dear boy ! How *could* they be happy on calf love ? "

"I don't see that love is any the worse for being what you call 'calf love.' "

Lady Moreton said ; "My *dear* boy ! "

XX

KINDERGARTEN

I

IT was February. How tedious now appeared this school, this kindergarten. It might be eminently suitable for infants, suitable even perhaps for boys. But Tony was a man. He had been picked up by Life for a few days ; and, although Life had suddenly and vilely dropped him, those few days had made him very old.

Now he had returned to a place where all femininity was suspected by the authorities of being inherently evil, and where he was required to enthuse over such things as Sophocles and House matches. And all the time he must never reveal himself ; must always continue to appear the enthusiastic Captain of the House. There was nobody in whom he could confide. He avoided Ronny. Ronny would by now have found out about his affair with Helen. And Ronny had always been curiously jealous for his sister. He could not even go and talk to Kitson. He remembered the envelope that he had seen on the table in the Bantons' house.

The flat weeks crawled by ; and Tony found that, though a certain vividness in the recollection of those three days gradually faded, yet there came a point when he could forget no more of the details of that night - a point beyond which he did not want to forget any more. There was little enough distraction to be found at school. Tony had done and thought and felt everything which could be done, thought, or felt at Towers Hill. He could

progress no further. And now, to make things worse, the traditional *malaise* of the Easter term was making itself felt even in the monitors' common-room. A state of irritable *ennui*, due to the sleet and the fog and the prevalence of 'flu, had set in everywhere.

Time seemed to pass quickest in the company of Mr. Toppin — the clergyman-schoolmaster of the Fifth Form, who modified the schoolmaster's common vice of curiosity with a genuine human sympathy.

The first time Tony went to tea with Mr. Toppin he was feeling indescribably gloomy. Wearily he poured out his abysmal views on 'this kindergarten.'

"Don't you think," Mr. Toppin suggested quietly, "that you are a little selfish in your wishes to leave Towers Hill at once ?"

"Selfish!" exclaimed Tony. "Of course I am, sir. Who in this school, I should like to know, isn't fundamentally selfish? Ambition, 'push' in masters, and pride in boys, it's all this or that form of selfishness. And it's the same everywhere; it's the same at home. The so-called gentlemen are Conservatives because they want their money for themselves; and the so-called 'cads' vote Labour because they want money which they haven't got. Party politics is rooted in selfishness — steeped in it."

Mr. Toppin smiled. "Has all your faith in human nature vanished?" he enquired.

"All of it," said Tony earnestly. "Even love is selfish nowadays. You hear people saying that at all costs they want the person they love to be happy. And why? Solely because their own happiness depends upon the happiness of that other person."

"You are in a bad way," laughed Mr. Toppin. "And you a poet, too. I think we'd better have the Fifth Symphony, don't you? Perhaps it will relieve you."

And, because Mr. Toppin never or seldom answered Tony's complaints by direct argument, he was more effective than anyone had ever been in soothing Tony's moods. He was genuinely interested in Tony, and he invited him to go and have tea with him any Wednesday and Saturday that he was free.

And Tony went often; and gradually his impulsive ideas became modified beneath the unobtrusive influence of the clergyman's well-balanced mind.

It was always Tony who provoked the conversation, and always Mr. Toppin who said the last word.

On only one occasion did the clergyman descend to anything so inconclusive as argument; and that was when Tony had complained of the state of religion in Public Schools.

"No!" Toppin began gravely. "You're not being at all fair. Although I say it as shouldn't, your house-master is an exception. Good heavens! you don't imagine my confirmation classes are like those prex-gangs of his, do you?"

"As to what you say about not giving the people in his House a chance to be Christians — I'm not so sure about that either. It's surprising the numbers of Jennings's fellows I have known who have caught it afterwards from some fellow who had got it already, so to speak. And though at present your judgment is somewhat distorted by the element of compulsion, I honestly believe that, when you go to the 'Varsity, you will admit that our Sunday evening services have been some of the best hours of your life."

"Perhaps so," said Tony.

He was always more convinced than he cared to admit by this quiet man's untheatrical talk. And he would often think over what Toppin had said as he sat in his study in 'mousers,' or discuss it while strolling up and down

with Ronny on the far edge of the Round. There, as it were, across the Styx, he walked about silently at evening, feeling that great insatiable need for love. And gradually he came to realise that the pleasure of love is love ; and that one is happier in the love one gives than in the love that one receives ; in the passion one feels than in the passion one inspires. Oh ! if he only had someone to love, regardless of whether or no he was loved in return.

As the term went on the irritability in the monitors' room became more obvious. Tony took to going and sitting by himself in the lavatories. Anything to get away ! Anything to be alone ! Not that he had any objection to Beaumont and Dilling. Only that he could not bear to be always with them. When Dilling came into the room, it made him want to scream. When Beaumont asked a question, Tony found it difficult to find a civil word to say to him.

Then, one day, an old Towers Hill man came to see Jennings. Tony felt that it was up to him to make an effort to be at least civil. Ransom proved to be a typical Towers man. After a few attempts at humorous remarks, he said more seriously :

" Of course, what does strike one about coming back here is that, in spite of all your rules and things, you do manage to live your own, and not other people's, lives. For instance, in the firm I work with absolutely everyone takes their ideas and their talk and their way of living from books or films."

" I suppose so," said Tony. He was rather irritated. This was so exactly the sort of thing that every old boy said. And yet it occurred to him, as he thought it over in bed that night, it was true. True of the early years ; of his second year at least. Nothing like that first love of his had he ever experienced before ; had he ever

heard of before. It was spontaneous and natural and uncomprehended. Mind had not fingered it. Intellect and tradition had not guided it into the usual channels. It was freer than the wind. First love was the wild, demoniac love of a person. Later love was the love of love. Later love was the intellectualised, conventional pursuit of romance. But nothing like that first love would ever be experienced again. Sometimes, and because his life was empty, he would begin a triolet which he could not finish :

*I wish I were a butcher's boy,
And had a grocer's girl to love.*

.
*Oh ! What a wild ecstatic joy
If I were but a butcher's boy,
And had a girl to love.*

Silly, wasn't it ? He tore the rhyme up and threw it angrily into the fire.

Well, there was only a week more of this term left, now - this second term of his last year. (" And your last year, my boy, is always your best.")

On Saturday he went for his last tea with Toppin ; and it was not altogether agreeable to find Merrivale there too. He had always felt a slight inferiority complex for Merrivale. Somehow he always reminded him of one of those dark, influential ladies that had haunted the Courts of medieval Europe.

Mr. Toppin was playing the Third Movement of the Fifth Symphony when Tony came into the room. It certainly was a gigantic utterance, that Movement. Today, as he listened to those four Gargantuan blows endlessly repeated, there seemed to be a suggestion in it of the sinister inevitability of Merrivale. (" Do you know,

my sister has seven *fiances*? ” Yes, you little brute, I know.)

The large noises ended. The last of the *leit-motifs* was done.

“ Where will you be spending the holidays? ” Mr. Toppin asked.

Tony said : “ At home, I expect.”

“ Do you hunt in April? ” enquired Merrivale.

“ Of course.”

“ Well,” said Mr. Toppin at last, “ I have, for once, a constructive suggestion.”

“ Yes? ” Tony queried.

“ To you, as a thinking lad,” Mr. Topping continued, “ there has a hundred times occurred the thought that hunting ought to be stopped. You have said so to me more than a hundred times.

“ Now, why not do something about it? ” The clergyman paused and looked up at Tony. But Tony was looking at the fire, and his right foot was tapping the edge of the fender.

“ I suggest,” he continued, “ that henceforth you resolutely refuse to hunt.”

There was a pause.

“ Um! ” said Tony at last. “ It’s rather hard, you know.”

“ Of course it’s rather hard,” said Mr. Toppin severely ; “ anything that’s rather worth while is.”

And a minute or two later, with his mind immutably made up, Tony walked out of the warm room into the brittle April dusk.

Tea was finished on the day that Tony arrived home for the Easter holidays. Sir Francis lit a cigarette.

“ I’ve got a surprise for you, Tony,” he said.

“ Really, father? But how exciting.”

“ Yes; come on outside and I’ll show it you.”

Tony followed his father out into the stable yard, where Tyler was ready waiting for them.

“ Afternoon, Tyler,” said Tony. “ How are the horses? ”

“ They’re doin’ fine, sir,” said Tyler with a grin. “ But my word, sir, we’ve got one now to beat the lot of ‘em ! Ain’t we, Sir Francis? ”

Sir Francis smiled. “ Bring her out, Tyler,” he said.

Tyler disappeared into the chain of loose-boxes, and emerged again leading a small bay mare. The groom walked her round in a circle for Tony to have a good look at her.

“ What d’you think of ‘er now, sir? ” he asked proudly.

“ She is a beauty, isn’t she.” Tony said.

“ She is that, an’ no mistake, sir.”

“ Is she quite up to your weight though, father? ” Tony asked doubtfully.

“ You watch her trot,” said Sir Francis.

And, with a smart clip on the mare’s quarters, Tyler began his trot towards the gate rather more quickly than he had intended. Yes, she was a beautiful mover ! Sir Francis muttered happily to himself, while the sweat stood out on the unfortunate Tyler’s brow. At last, with a despairing “ What d’you think of ‘er now, sir? ” Tyler brought the mare to rest in front of them.

“ I think she’s perfect,” said Tony.

Sir Francis smiled. “ She’s for you,” he said.

“ Oh ! Father ! It’s much too good of you.”

“ For to-morrow, the last day of the season.”

“ Oh, father . . . ” Tony became incoherent. What was he to do ?

“ Not at all, Tony, not at all,” his father was saying. “ I’m only too glad to be able to afford to do it.”

They walked back to the house. At last :

"Thank you most awfully, father," said Tony, "but I'm not sure that I shall feel up to hunting to-morrow."

Sir Francis looked hurt.

"I'm sorry," he said, "How's that?"

"Well, I'm feeling a bit run down."

"Oh, I expect you'll be all right in the morning. Besides, a good jolting will do you good."

The next morning it was raining when Lewis came into the room.

"A nasty morning, sir," he remarked. "Will you wear your old or your new pair of riding-breeches?"

"Neither, Lewis. I'm not hunting to-day."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Lewis imperturbably, "but Sir Francis . . ."

"Oh, Sir Francis this and Sir Francis that! These damned titles again. All hereditary titles ought to be abolished. Isn't a baptismal name good enough? If I'd been my father I shouldn't have taken the title, Lewis. I'll wear my plus fours. The brown ones."

When Tony arrived down to breakfast, he found his father just about to leave the room. (Sir Francis was always particularly early on hunting mornings.)

"Why on earth haven't you got your boots on, Tony?" he asked testily, eyeing Tony's plus fours with extreme disfavour. Tony noticed that his father had been clumsy with his razor, and that his white stock had a spot of blood on it.

"I'm afraid I really don't feel up to hunting this morning, father."

"Oh, come! The last day of the season! Why, it'll make you feel all the better."

"I don't feel like it."

He had told Mr. Toppin that he was not going to hunt

and he wouldn't hunt. Besides, he hated riding on to the meet.

And so, when, at 10.15 that morning, Tyler brought both Sir Francis's grey and the new bay mare round to the mounting-block, Tony was not to be found.

And, quite alone, Sir Francis rode down the drive, and out of the gates. He was swearing a little to himself; for he couldn't for the life of him think of an answer for all the people who were sure to come up and ask him :

"Why, what's happened to Tony and the bay?"

Tony spent the day walking about the park. Yes, he decided that he was in the right. He was only keeping the promise that he had made to Toppin. After lunch he strolled down to the south lodge. He leant over the gate. Why! here were the hounds coming down the lane towards him. Surely they couldn't be going to draw the Burnans coverts? He dodged behind a tree. No, they were going past the gate. Why, what had happened to the field? There was nobody with the hounds except the hunt servants. They must be going home. Tony looked at his watch. A quarter to three. How utterly absurd! Still, he must be getting back to the house or he would run into his father.

In the hall Tony found Tyler, hat in hand.

"Beg pardon, sir," he whispered, "but where's her ladyship?"

"Don't know, Tyler; why?"

Tyler hesitated. "Well, sir," he said, "Sir Francis has gone away, sir."

Tony chuckled. "Eloped, has he, Tyler?" he said.

"No, sir," said Tyler earnestly, "he's gone away."

Tony turned to the very old record box; he put on 'My sweetie went away.' But it was a bad tune, and he could not bear to have it played through. Lewis came

into the room, and Tony stopped the gramophone. Really the man seemed unusually agitated. Lewis inclined his head a trifle, then :

" You haven't seen her ladyship, sir ? Beg pardon, sir — Sir Anthony, I should say."

Tony frowned. " What do you mean, ' Sir Anthony,' Lewis ? It's neither funny nor clever."

" Haven't they told you, sir ? " Lewis almost whispered.

" Told me what ? " snapped Tony. Why couldn't the man speak out ?

Lewis inclined his head a little further, and cleared his throat. " That Sir Francis rode at a five-barred gate, sir," he murmured. " We are deeply sorry, sir."

Hazily, Tony watched Lewis disappear into the hall. Sir Francis :

' five-barred gate ' ;
 ' gone away ' ;
 Sir Anthony.

Slowly he put it together.

His father was dead.

Furious at his son's ingratitude, he had ridden at what, for a man of sixty, was an impossible obstacle.

Tony was shocked. It was sudden ; desperately sudden. This morning his father had gone out much as usual ; only rather noisily. And this evening he would come home very quietly. . . . Yes, everything would be very quiet to-night. They would pull the blinds down ; and silently Lewis would walk about the dining-room ; and the housemaids would forbear to snigger.

It was all most irregular . . . and a little frightening. Tony became aware of the urgent presence of death.

His mother came into the room and sat down quietly and sadly at her writing-table.

He went and stood beside her. Oh, how useless he was,

how inadequate, how dumb ! At last she looked up at him.

" Poor mum," he murmured.

She put her arm round his waist.

" Thank you for saying that, Tony," she said.

For two hours, as he lay in bed that night, Tony thought over the situation. He was ashamed, fearfully ashamed.

Violent remorse came up in him. How rottenly he had behaved ! Savagely he bit into the sheet. Yes, he had behaved like a cad. What was the matter with him ? Why hadn't he done what his father wanted ? Remorse became submerged in grief. Suddenly he started to cry. Grotesque and absurd, it sounded to him, this idiot noise that he was throwing into the sheer silence of the house. He had not cried for three years. O God ! was he going mad ? He thought of his mother. Poor mother ! Would she be crying ? Mummy ?

Gradually he became asleep.

XXI

KING FOR A DAY

MR. HERBERT RORETON, Tony's uncle, had sent his new ward off to school for the last time.

"It's your last term, my boy. Make it your best."

Last terms, Tony decided quickly, are very seldom the best. There was, of course, cricket; but cricket did not start too promisingly. And there was Ronny. But Ronny's affection for him was like a well. And Tony needed affection as of a river.

No, if anything was going to get him through this term, it would be success at cricket. And so it was really serious when, after the first three matches, Tony realised that he had made but nine runs in all. Ordinarily, Tony enjoyed school matches; one at least saw eleven new faces even though it was from behind the bars.

But this year it was different.

This year, school matches consisted of one long, morbid brooding as to whether he would ever make runs. Even though he was vice-captain of the side, they couldn't keep him in for ever. True, everyone, Merrivale especially, was sympathetic — a sympathy which was the more comforting because it was never spoken. But one could not make runs on sympathy alone. By no amount of willing, no amount of trying, no amount of practice, can one make runs when one is out of luck. Life became one series of walks from the crease, interspersed with partly-compensating conversations with Merrivale. For on these days Merrivale was always more comforting than

Ronny. And, in spite of himself, Tony took it as rather a compliment to receive the sympathy, and opinions, and, presently, the confidences of this curiously attractive boy, whose name had somehow always been linked with the names of gods and heroes. And gradually the fourfold thunder of the Fifth Symphony began to take the place of Chopin's delicate nocturne as the last record played before bed.

On the afternoon of the old boys' dance Tony went to tea with Kitson.

"You seem to have deserted your friend." Kitson opened the conversation with a typically inquisitive remark.

"What do you mean, sir? Who?"

"Don't you consider Ronny Banton your friend?"

"Oh! Oh, yes."

"Since when? Have you deserted him, I mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. Since I met the family, I suppose."

"The mother and father?"

"No-o," said Tony dubiously.

"The sister?"

"I suppose so. Yes."

"I'm sorry." Kitson smiled merrily.

"Ronny's rather jealous for his sister, I think, sir."

"Really? I hadn't noticed it."

"Really?" said Tony mockingly.

"Really," Kitson answered gravely.

"Oh! Oh! I see! I'm sorry. I'm treading on the grass, am I?"

Kitson did not answer. He handed Tony the plate of chocolate biscuits.

"A biscuit for a good little boy," he said.

Tony nibbled the biscuit thoughtfully.

Suddenly he exclaimed :

" Do you remember when you had a bachelor complex ? "

Kitson tried to look surprised.

" Yes. Why do you ask ? "

Tony laughed.

" Wasn't it a funny idea ? " he said.

" Very odd indeed."

" And do you remember when I said that it would probably be a House matron ? "

" Yes."

" Well, I withdraw that."

" Really, Roretton," said Kitson with mock gravity, " I must remind you that you are taking tea with a member of the magisterial diploma."

" I know, sir. Perhaps I'd better go ? "

" No, you needn't do that."

" I think I'd better. Ronny's taking me out to dinner with his people."

" Really ? Then we might walk down town together."

" Are you coming to dinner too ? "

" Why not ? I'm going to the dance as Helen's partner."

" Oh," said Tony. He was tempted to add, " Only to the dance ? " Yes. His theory was taking definite shape.

They walked slowly along the Avenue and down past the mere. Kitson talked gaily.

" There's poor old Mr. Brooke," he said suddenly, pointing to a rotund figure some way in front of them.

" Why ' poor old ' ? He's happy enough."

" My dear Tony, no one can be happy till they're married."

" I suppose not." Tony smiled to himself. Quite obviously Kitson wanted him to know.

They arrived at the hotel : and Ronny and Helen

greeted them excitedly. . . . Helen was looking neat and attractive. No, she was not really pretty, but she had a compensating freshness of feature and character. The pain of memory did not hurt Tony as much as he had expected. At dinner he watched her. She talked nearly all the time to Kitson, lightly, almost frivolously, but with a trace of nervousness which seemed to Tony to be significant.

After dinner Ronny and Tony walked back up to the school.

Tony was determined to confirm or destroy his theory.

" Helen and Kitson seem to get on well together."

" Dam' well," said Ronny emphatically.

" They're going to the dance to-night, aren't they ? "

" Yes. And after a glass or two of fizz I should think it'll be odds on."

" How d'you mean ? "

" I mean that by to-morrow morning they'll be engaged."

" Do you really think so ? " said Tony.

" I know it."

" Oh. I expect you're glad."

" Yes, Tony. We're all very glad indeed."

And that night as he sat up on the window-sill of his bedroom, looking out over the Round, Tony thought of Kitson and Helen. They would be dancing now. Or perhaps they would be sitting out. Or perhaps . . . How, Tony wondered, did one ' propose ' ? ' Will you be my wife ? ' ' I want you to marry me.' All so bald and inadequate. No, he decided, people didn't say anything when they became engaged. They just *knew*. He was happy for Kitson now. Merely happy. All feelings of envy had gone out of him. Still, he would like to see Kitson proposing. He would do it quite frivolously, perhaps, and Helen would think he was joking. He was

glad that Kitson was going to marry. It would be amusing ; and it would be something to fill the void that would rush in for Kitson when he retired.

The next day Tony looked for Kitson in chapel. He wasn't there. Probably still asleep. Not even the Bantons were there." Tony was waiting to see Ronny outside chapel, when Roy Merrivale came up to him.

" What about a walk this afternoon, Roretton ? "

" I'd love it. Thanks awfully."

And that afternoon, because of the tense excitement of being near Roy, Tony forgot altogether to ask after Kitson. It was curious that the rumour had not gone round yet. Still . . . it was too hot to think about such things. One could only walk along the edge of Coney Hill and gaze at the stream. They talked easily, with intervals of warm silence. The two of them were complementary, self-sufficient. There was no need for incessant conversation. The heat of the sun was curling the leaves of the bracken backwards and bringing out the pungent smell of the garlic plants. Midges hummed drowsily over the quiet stream. The cows in the meadow were shaking their heads free from flies.

In some indefinable way Tony realised the connection between Roy and the day. He felt the sky and the stream-water in Roy's eyes. He was aware that Roy drew into himself an intangible warmth from the sun. He remembered Laing's words :

*Once I had a lover bright like running water
Once, his face was open like the sky !*

There was a certain terrifying warmth in Roy, over which a tense remoteness had been superimposed. ' Thus far shalt thou come and no farther.' It was in his voice, in his smile, and in the message of his eyes.

As they were walking home, Tony remembered that Kitson had asked him to supper that evening. After chapel, Tony made his way over to the masters' lodging. The masters fed communally ; but to-night Tony found only Mr. Kitson and Mr. Corfield there when he walked into the dining-room.

" Good evening, Tony. Had a good walk ? "

Kitson was evidently happy enough. Tony wished that there had not been a third person. He wanted so badly to hear all about it.

" Hullo, Roretton," said Corfield. " Come on in. What are you going to drink ? "

" May I have beer, please, sir ? "

" Ale ? Splendid. Ale for you, George ? "

" Yes, please, Mr. Corfield," said Kitson facetiously. They talked about the chapel services.

" Did you have a good sermon this morning ? " Kitson asked.

" Frightful," said Tony.

" Ghastly," said Corfield. " The man began talking cant about ' your magnificent playing-fields.' I didn't hear any more."

" Did you have a good dance, sir ? " Tony said at last.

" A very admirable dance indeed," said Kitson, with an especial smile.

" Plenty to drink, George ? " enquired Corfield.

" I believe that there was a superfluity of liquor, Mr. Corfield," Kitson mocked again.

And the conversation ran on conventionally.

At last : " Well," said Corfield, " I must go and correct my boys' Latin sentences."

Tony went with Kitson upstairs to his sitting-room. There was a difficult silence while Kitson made coffee. Once Kitson looked up at Tony and smiled. But Tony

did not accept the invitation ; he could not find words for his curiosity.

Kitson handed him a cup of coffee. Tony took it : sat down in an armchair and exclaimed fatuously :

" Do you approve of long engagements ? "

The smile vanished from Kitson's face. He shrugged his shoulders.

" I don't know," he said. " Why ? "

" Well, but I mean. . . . Well, don't you mind ? "

Kitson shrugged again.

" *N'importe*," he said. " To me the matter is irrelevant."

" You don't mean that ! "

" Certainly I do."

" But you don't mean . . ." Tony hesitated, amazed. Kitson smiled.

" I don't mean that I was turned down, if that's what you're thinking."

" Oh. Oh. . . . I'm sorry."

" Why be sorry ? I'm not. I'm thankful."

" Thankful ? "

" Thankful that I saw it in time."

" Oh."

Kitson flicked nervously at his cigarette.

" No," he said at last. " It wouldn't have done. In fact, it will never do. You see, I could never have really surrendered myself. There is a core in my being which can never be really merged in another person ; not even mystically. Under these circumstances . . . marriage seems futile."

" But surely, sir. . . . Well, I mean, does that apply to everyone ? "

" I don't know. All I do know is that it applies to me."

Kitson paused again : lit another cigarette.

" And when," he went on, " it dawns on one that one can never achieve a consummation " – he shrugged his shoulders – " it's pretty bad."

Tony nodded. He was very sad for this queer, disappointed man.

" You see," Kitson continued, " the thing is this : I am a person of a certain depth. Either I must merge my entire self wholly and fundamentally in my wife : or else – I must keep my real self utterly apart from her, and never reveal, never surrender. Well – you know Helen. You know what she's like. Fragile, charming, little. She's too frail to bear all my moods. She's too little to fit in with all my colony of personalities. Is it fair to marry her, graft her into this school, and live with her, knowing that to the end of my days she will never understand me ; that she can, in fact, never really be my wife ? "

Tony sighed.

" But surely, sir, you could find some sort of balance with her ? You could sort of merge some of your personality in her ? "

Kitson laughed quietly.

" I don't know so much. If you'd ever experienced the sense of futility in taking a girl in your arms and kissing her, and pressing her body to yours, the futility of talk, the futility of all so-called love-making, you wouldn't say that."

" There is," Kitson went on more quietly, " there is a consummation which is not futile. And that is achieved in silence, and often without touching. But one can't explain it. It's intangible ; and language hasn't words to describe it."

" But exactly," Tony exclaimed. " I know exactly. Why wouldn't that do ? "

" Not with Helen. It wouldn't be permanent. It's a

pity, though. Girls like her don't come twice into a schoolmaster's life."

"But surely, sir, mightn't there be . . . I mean, aren't there others?"

"Others?" Kitson laughed bitterly. "I am worn out with the effort of trying to love others. I don't love others. I can't love others. And now I won't try to love others any more."

They sat looking out of the window. On the laburnum-tree opposite a chaffinch was singing out its heart.

Kitson smiled wearily.

"I shall never marry now," he said. "It won't really matter. Perhaps if I ever get a House I shall be a better housemaster for it."

For two or three minutes they sat there silent. Then :

"Well, good night, Tony. I've got twenty-three proses to correct for to-morrow. Perhaps I shall be a very fair specimen of a schoolmaster again in the morning."

Speech-Day came, bringing with it the most important inter-school match. And still Tony had not made more than 10 runs in an innings. His mother had written a letter saying that she felt sure that he would make a hundred on Speech-Day; and that she was coming up to watch him do it. As for Tony, he felt very doubtful whether he would be playing at all on Speech-Day. But, when the list went up on the evening before, he found that they had given him another chance. Well, he would have to make runs to-morrow, or . . .

That evening he walked about the Round after tea with Merrivale. Very tactfully Merrivale gave him that sympathy-before-the-event, which is always more natural and effective than sympathy administered after the thing has happened.

"After all," he said, "what do games ultimately matter? I don't suppose, when we get to the end of this

term, that we shall remember our fifties so much as our friends. And, after all," Merrivale added, "you are fond of me, aren't you?"

Tony looked at him, astonished, and not a little comforted. Ronny could never have said that. He really was getting on rather well with this deity from another sphere.

The next day Lady Roretton arrived just as Tony was putting on his pads to go in.

"Good luck, dear," she said. "I know you're going to make runs."

Tony felt hideously nervous as he walked towards the wicket. As if anyone could know that one was going to make runs. How tall the bowler looked. One false stroke now, one slowness of hand or eye, and he would never play cricket for the school again. The idea was not good to contemplate. They were clapping him out to the wicket ; clapping him with their hands - yes. But in their hearts they were saying :

"Why is this man kept in the side? He has no business to be playing for the school."

He put his bat in the block.

How the wicket-keeper towered over him!

"One leg, sir. A little more for two. Two." Eleven against one. Eleven people all trying to get him dropped. It wasn't fair. It wasn't. . . .

The ball left the bowler's hand.

Well up. . . . A full pitch . . . ? . . . No. A half-volley.

He played forward, his wrists stiff, and his head well over the ball. He had not hit it hard. But the shot was perfectly timed. The ball skimmed along past mid-off's left hand to the boundary.

That was better. He felt that he had already

half-justified his place. They were clapping him from the school wall, clapping as if they were with him, as if they were behind him.

He tapped his bat in the block-hole. The bowler took his run.

Another half-volley? No, no. Short of a length. Back. Quickly.

But the ball cut through more quickly still. There was a thud, and it bounced off his pad and lay twisting convulsively in the middle of the pitch.

"How was it?" — A grim chorus. The umpire's finger rose.

Out? Yes, of course he was out.

He turned toward the pavilion. He glanced at the school wall. No, there was no groaning; but the whole line of spectators wavered as though a wind had bent them.

So it was over. He unwound his absurd gloves. He could hardly believe that this really was his last match. Somehow he had always believed that he would make runs to-day. Well, it was no use worrying about it now.

He was passing out of the area of cricket now, into the area of silence. Wearily he walked up the pavilion steps. The rows of figures on the wall were silent, watching his every step.

"That," they were saying, "is the end of him." At the door of the pavilion he met Merrivale, who was just going in.

"Poor old boy," he said warmly. "It's too bad."

He went into the dressing-room to take off his pads.

"I'm sorry, Manners," he said.

"Bad luck, Tony," said Manners. He was really sorry; but then he had to get the best side out of the school.

Tony walked out of the pavilion towards where his mother was sitting. Again all the spectators were looking at him. But the moment of calculating hardness was past; it was sympathy they were giving him now.

He walked up to his mother's chair.

"Hullo, Tony," she said in an embarrassingly loud voice. "You're not out, are you?"

That was too much, too much. What on earth would that group of fags sitting below them on the wall think? Really, his mother's lack of cricket intelligence was painful at times.

"Oh, yes, I am," he answered bitterly, but more quietly.

"But why," her ladyship went on — as if she could still make it better — "it didn't hit the wicket did it?"

"No," said Tony a little tersely. "I was l.b.w. — I mean leg before wicket."

"Oh." There was a pause. His mother realised what she had done.

"I'm sorry," she said.

And together they sat there in silence, the son not wishing, and the mother not daring, to say a word, till the whole side was out.

At about six o'clock, his mother drove away. And the least bad moment of a bad day came when Merrivale said:

"Shall we go for a walk to-morrow, Tony?"

Tony!

And next day, because the sun was shining, and the birds were manifestly happy, and the cows obviously contented, but most of all because he was walking by Roy Merrivale's side, Tony decided that perhaps it was not so terrible to be dropped from the cricket XI. After all, what reason was there to feel uncomfortable? There was no reason to be embarrassed by the gaze of the

school ; they sympathised, he knew they did. No, the only real embarrassment was in the presence of himself, because of a certain blunt shock to his most secret prides. Besides, was not Roy ample compensation - Roy and the sun and the fields ?

"I have often wondered," Roy was saying, "what would have happened if you'd never found Banton and I'd never known Vincent. I've often wondered, but I've never been able to say so till to-day."

"You mean, you wonder what would have happened if we had met each other sooner ?"

"Yes," said Roy. "Don't you think it would have been pleasant, Tony ?"

"I think it would have been perfect," said Tony sincerely.

Of course it would have been perfect ! Ideal. But Merrivale had always been so remote, so much higher up in his influences and friends, that Tony had never allowed himself to hope. Why, yes ! He and Merrivale would have been the perfect friends. And simultaneously with a vague indefinite hope, there was borne into Tony a sense of terrible waste.

"What a waste of five years," he said aloud. "I've often realised that neither Peter's nor Ronny's minds were good enough for mine. Conceited, isn't it ?"

"No, not in the least," said Roy quietly. "It's perfectly true. You're an incurable romantic ; and Banton's just hopelessly bourgeois."

And that, felt Tony, was just it. They paused to lean on the parapet of a little bridge. Tony gazed at the stream he had looked at each Sunday for five years. Today it was almost dry.

"Don't you think," he said, "if we went about together for these remaining three weeks, it would do something to repair the waste ?"

"It might," said Roy slowly, "only I should hate Ronny and Vincent to feel sick about it."

"Damn Ronny and Vincent !" said Tony.

That night, as he lay in bed, he thought of Roy leaning carelessly on that old stone bridge, with his grey eyes looking curiously into his own. And all the love which Tony had for so long suppressed for this, the most attractive boy in the school, came pouring out. He worshipped him ; he always had, but this was the first time that he had dared to admit it. After all, he remembered Canning, who had been so scolded for allowing his affection to be observed.

And there came to Tony those lines of Humbert Wolfe's :

*And love will come when life has said, "It's late ;
He'll not be here to-night."*

Why, he wondered, had it taken him these five years to find the real Jonathan ? It was always at evening that love came.

Oh, yes ! there was no doubt who had been his real predestined friend.

And next day, for the first time for many months, he allowed his pen to overflow.

'You will be wondering perhaps,' he wrote, 'why I have suddenly begun to pester you with stupid bits of paper. It is thus : Not even the most earnest poet is hopeful that, if he cries to the moon, it will show that it has heard. He knows, however, that if by any singular chance it should hear, it would break into a faint and slightly contemptuous smile. Instead, therefore, he refrains from crying to the moon ; he has seen the fate of others. The moon is so far and remote and

inaccessible, that it is better to mask one's adoration. It hurts less that way.

'And then suddenly the moon comes down, like a thief in the night, from that other world in which it dwells. Is it any wonder that the pent-up cries break out ?

'They have said, and they say it still daily, how that the moon leans down towards mortals, only to dazzle them, and then to withdraw itself and leave them crying for its shadow. They have said all things of you, O Moon, save this, that whether you lean down only to withdraw yourself, or whether even you, O Moon, are affected, if ever so slightly; by human emotion, however this be, your presence is Happiness and your less distant smile, Content.'

But, when read out, it sounded rather foolish. Better to destroy it. It was no use following Canning into insanity.

The days passed, and Tony had eyes and ears for only one thing. 'The best days of his life' were slipping through his fingers - yes. But every evening after tea he had the high privilege of walking over the Round with Roy. And as the sun sank and its powerful rays no longer beat into Tony's frame, a new force came upon him that he was then never able to understand. For sometimes, as they walked along the shadowy edges of the Round, Roy would glance at him without speaking, and suddenly and involuntarily Tony would exclaim :

"Oh ! Roy, I can't walk so near you. You electrify me. Your current is too strong for me."

And if Tony could not understand this sensation, Roy was even more at a loss. And it was not till two years afterwards that Tony discovered that the phenomenon had a scientific explanation.

'They are not long, the days of wine and roses.' There was only one week more. In a fortnight this wonderful friend whom he had only just discovered would be forever removed from him. It was evening ; and Tony's heart was exceeding full. He took a piece of House newspaper and sat down at his study table.

'I see you in laughter and in sadness,' he wrote, 'in sunshine and in rain. I see you between the spring hedgerows and among the huddled autumn leaves. I see you standing solitary in the Avenue with the tall elms leaning shyly towards you, and I see you among the secret shrubs of Coney Hill. I see you, an over-confident new boy, stamping and shouting upon a Third Form desk. I see you looking at the notice-board, having failed, sinisterly but triumphantly, to be given your Colts colours. I see you a shadow figure among the ghostly trees, with your eyes beckoning through the autumn fog. I see you as the spirit of the Round, and the genius of the old June mere. I see the angry compression of your mouth for someone whose eyes have dared to say "I worship you." I see you in the tumult of the Fifth Symphony.'

'And now I shall not see you any more. Oh ! give me a photograph of yourself, that I may see you even when you are no more seen.'

Tony read it through. It did not dawn upon him that the letter was painfully affected. He did not realise that his head had expressed feelings which his heart had not felt. He could not recognise the ruinously intellectualised nature of his love. The theatricality had eaten too deep, too far into his being, for that.

The next evening Tony met Roy outside the gym. Roy said : "Thank you for that letter."

Tony smiled.

"I have made a point," Roy continued, "of keeping every sentimental letter or note that has been sent to me at this school."

"I suppose," said Tony, "that you will one day have an amusing two hours of reading."

Roy smiled impishly.

"It'll be a damned sight more than two hours," he said.

XXII

APEX

TONY went for his last tea with Kitson.

"Four years is up, Tony. D'you realise that?"

"Yes. I realise it. Thank you, sir."

"Well, was it true?"

"What?"

"About love being due to stimulus."

"Oh! That! Well, I don't really know."

"Do you mean that you don't want to tell me, or that you don't honestly know yourself?"

"Oh, no! Of course I'd tell you, but . . ."

Tony put down his tea-cup.

"Well." Kitson threw the tea-leaves carelessly into the slop-basin. "Well, and what about life? Pattern or tangle?"

Tony laughed. He said:

"Tangle."

Kitson's Puckish eyebrows flickered upwards.

"I'm sorry. What makes you think that?"

"May I try and explain?"

"Please do."

"Well, it's this. For the last five years I haven't seen any signs of symmetry - or permanent reciprocation, I mean - in any one. A pattern must be complete, mutual - a complete circle. All my circles have been one-sided. I don't know if you understand . . .?"

Kitson nodded.

"I do," he said quietly.

"The first circle was before this place - at my other school. It was the only reciprocation ever. It was marvellous. We had, as it were, one common centre. Silly that sounds, doesn't it?" he said, glancing up at Kitson.

Kitson smiled. "No," he said. "I don't think it sounds silly."

"Well, anyhow, it was literally perfect. We knew that it *could* last for ever. Then I came here; and he went elsewhere. It didn't survive. Of course not. After that there was chaos; just a mess of tangled ends.

"The next circle came two years later. It was never reciprocated really. It was a broken arc from the first. But for me it was real enough. I believed that it would become symmetrical - ideal. It didn't. I stamped that out in myself.

"There followed a quiet, calculated, cold-blooded -- well - companionship. (Rotten word!) Ronny Banton, of course.

"Then - last Christmas. It was all over very quickly - in two days. A supposedly perfect circle turning out to be just a broken arc, like the others.

"And then . . ." Tony hesitated, wondering whether to speak out.

"And then?"

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"And then, nothing," he lied. "Just a blank. That's all."

"I see."

Kitson stared out of the window at the roof of the house opposite.

"May I preach to you?" he said at last.

"Yes, do." Tony let his head fall back upon the top of the chair.

"I'm going to be assertive, if you don't mind." Kitson

began. "In the first place, life is a pattern. You think it is a tangle because it fails to fulfil your preconceived idealist ideas of symmetry; because it doesn't appear to form your particular selfish kind of pattern. You think it a tangle because your life has consisted of four little airtight pigeon-holed incidents. Because none of these incidents lead on from one another. Because in the story of your life there is no progress, no connected thread, rising to a climax. Therefore a tangle.

"You had expected that when you came, during your last term, to look back upon your time here, you would see the graph of your life stretching continuously back to your first term, solving difficulties as it came, progressing, and reaching at last some final conclusion.

"But you had no right to demand that your life should be that shape. You had no right to expect it to be a path from sunrise leading directly to sunset. You must think of your experience as a chain of mountains lying straight across that idealised path of your life. Four mountain peaks all impressing upon you in different ways the self-same lesson of experience. It is the unified effect of these four experiences that make the pattern. Not the conventional straightforward pattern that you had impatiently expected. For these are not progressive experiences - they do not lead out of the sunrise one after the other up to the hill of manhood. But they are all the same distance away - and they are all of large though different significance.

"Do you get that . . . ?"

"Only dimly. . . ."

"Well - how can I explain it?" Kitson drummed on the table with his forefinger. "I wonder if you know T. S. Eliot's poetry?"

"No."

"Well, I'll lend you *The Waste Land* some time. But

the point is that there is no intellectual thread between the stanzas ; they are united by the accord and contrast of their emotional effects. The value lies in the unified responses in the reader to these separate effects. Or again, you've read the *Bridge of San Luis Rey* ? Well, there the four parts are all entirely disconnected and separate in their matter, but the moral, the significance, is similar and cumulative."

"Yes. . . . I think I am beginning to see that. But what is the cumulative gist of the pattern, so to speak ?"

"The gist of the pattern is : that you have founded your ideals on a false hypothesis ; that love is the thing most worth while. Perhaps, sometimes, failing to find feelings of love in yourself, you have nurtured such feelings artificially almost. You have obeyed the hypothetical commandment : 'I must feel deeply.'

"You thought that a boy friend is what you needed at school. You have seen this idea break down time and again - this ideal of reciprocation. For God's sake don't go into life thinking that a woman friend is what you need. Don't pray for love. Pray for life. For lightning. And don't try and possess lightning. Remember that, or you'll catch it."

Tony frowned. He was curiously angry.

"That aims at the whole theory of my life, my ideals."

"Your illusions ! They are synonymous. You *must* get that. Ideals are hopelessly played out. Illusions !"

"You say so," said Tony, suppressing the resentment that welled up inside him. "You say so." He was remembering Roy. There at least, though late, he had certainly found the ideal, the reciprocated conclusion.

"Your illusions," Kitson repeated ; "and this apparently unprogressive life of yours is a fourfold demonstration of the fact that you have been looking for the wrong things. You have devoted yourself to a kind of not

unpleasurable melancholy. You have been looking all the time for some one obsessing person to rid you of that melancholy, and to complete you, your self, your personality ; to be complementary to you.

"Think of your experience as being the four sides of a pyramid. You have scaled the pyramid from each of the four sides. Each ascent has led you to the same place - the apex. From the apex you can survey the fourfold lesson of experience. Now. . . .

"You have been looking for something to help you face the prospect of day following day, day following day, monotonously, insanely. The first thing that you must get hold of is that ideals are a blind alley. If you don't admit that by now, you are both a fool and a coward. The second thing is that you will never get what you need in a woman. 'Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them - but not for love.' Just as you have never got what you have been looking for in a friend. Do you see ? That's what the pattern means. Never from love ! *Never from a friend.*"

Abruptly, Tony got up to go. The tide of resentment was springing within him.

"I don't believe that," he said.

The last week passed. Tony made a slight effort to experience the appropriate emotions. But, somehow, boredom was always creeping in. The sensations of leaving had, in his case, been suffered at the end of the Christmas term.

The last evening came, with the last traditional chapel ; and Tony found the service a trifle disappointing. The preacher was saying how sorry those leaving doubtless were to separate themselves from this place and from this chapel ; and Tony was a little irritated, because the only separation he felt was the impending parting from Roy.

For him, the whole of Towers Hill had resolved itself into that one figure. Roy. Roy. In that name lay for him the whole significance of 'Abide with Me.'

He walked out of chapel, carelessly conscious that he would not walk out of chapel again ; and he smiled as he caught sight of a small face in one of the back benches with its eyes protruding out of its head in the hope of detecting one of 'the bloods' with a lump in his throat or a tear in his eye.

Tony walked across the Round to Mr. Toppin's House. He had decided to go and say good-bye only to a few masters. And as he trod the moist grass he wondered vaguely what was the sum of things that he had saved for pay. What was the meaning of these last five years ? 'On earth the broken arcs.' It had been a time of disruptions and fresh starts.

Phil - with the perfect friendship of which the fates had evidently been jealous.

Peter - with the long, tedious period of service that had ended in pain.

Ronny - with his quiet, soothing, but slightly inadequate companionship.

Helen - a brief, transient comet in his grave heaven.

And now Roy, perhaps the most suitable of them all - but the Fates had again been envious.

He knocked on the door of Toppin's study.

There was camp, of course. . . . Perhaps that would be recompense for everything. And after camp . . . ? But Tony had refused to contemplate the possibility of a life after camp, and he would not consider it now.

Mr. Toppin opened the door.

"I'm afraid I'm interviewing parents," he said, "so I mustn't be long. But you must let me hear from you, Roretton ; and, whatever you do, go on writing poetry."

"I expect I shall do that, sir," Tony answered.

"Poetry seems to be my only legitimate claim on life to allow me to continue living."

Mr. Toppin laughed gently. "On the other hand," he said, "you mustn't overestimate your art. For heaven's sake don't become a literary snob. It's worse than the ordinary kind. If I was you I'd keep playing rugger and cricket as long as I could."

"Why, sir ?" asked Tony.

"For one thing," Mr. Toppin answered, "it makes you balanced. Besides, if you are naturally a talented poet, you ought to spare no efforts to make yourself a good cricketer or a good stockbroker. You will then have the English nation at your feet. If you want to be successful in this country you must be versatile - adept in one thing ; and proficient at two other things entirely different."

He stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye, Tony," he said. "And, conventional though it be, good luck."

Tony walked back over the deserted Round. This was the evening about which he had so often wondered. From beyond the Tower Hall the school clock struck the hour of nine. Well, it was over now.

A gust of wind cut through him. The wind was blowing him down the Avenue and out of the gates. In September it would be doing the same thing to the leaves. But he would not see it.

How futile it all was. He, and all those like him, were no more than the first harvest of the wind.

XXIII

'LE TEMPS DE MILLE FLEURS'

THERE was not a great deal to do at camp. There were parades, of course, to attend, and discipline to enforce. And Tony noticed the sullen, almost mutinous, way with which some people obeyed his orders. It was almost as though he had already left.

There was not a great deal to do. He would not molest Roy. Roy had promised to grant him a splendid leave-taking – a whole August night in which to talk to the person he liked best – alone. And Roy had said that he would much rather be quite alone till then.

All the same, Tony's dramatic sense demanded some slight compensation. And so it was arranged.

On the very first day Tony had gone into Hatton's lines to look for Philip How. A little nervously, he asked a small Hattonian whether he could tell him which tent How was in. But the Hattonian did not so much as know that there was a person called How at Hatton.

"What way is it spelt?" he asked. "H-O-W," said Tony.

"Oh," replied the other at last, "I believe that that was the man who changed his name when he came to Hatton."

"Really?" said Tony.

At which moment he felt a hand clapped on his shoulder and turned round to find himself face to face with Philip.

"Hullo," said Tony. "I was just coming to look for you, Phil. I hear you have changed your name."

Phil laughed quietly. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I have," he said with a queer air of finality.

Tony gazed at him. He had altered a good deal in looks. The mouth was fuller now; and even the eyes seemed browner. . . .

And so it had been arranged.

And so it happened that at exactly five minutes to six, on the second evening before the end of camp, Tony and Phil met at the card-room corner of the N.A.A.F.I. tent.

"Come and eat melon on Monday at five to six prompt," Tony had said to Phil on that first day. And Phil had kept the appointment.

They sat down at a table. At almost the same moment Roy Merrivale emerged from the card-room, and Ronny Banton came, from the direction of the counter, towards them.

Roy bounced up to the table. "Oh! I'm sorry, Tony," he said, as he noticed the stranger. "I thought this was the time you said for your melon-party."

Tony smiled with pleasure. "It was," he said. "Do sit down, Roy; the melon's coming."

Two tables away, Ronny was twisting round on a chair, wondering whether he had mistaken the time for which Tony had asked him to come and have a *tête-à-tête* in the N.A.A.F.I.

"Come on, Ronny," Tony called out. "You're terribly late."

Ronny came and sat down. Where could Peter be? If he did not come soon, the introductions would have to proceed without him.

Ah! here he was.

"Hullo, Tony!" said Peter, quite failing to employ

his best behaviour for the stranger's benefit. "How's the story-telling party going?"

"Sit down and don't be hearty," said Tony. "You're going to be introduced."

Tony rose.

"Phil," he said, smiling, "I apologise for my friends, and proceed to present them to you. This one," he went on, pointing to Peter, "was ever so charming four years ago. Mr. Peter Sladen : Mr. Philip - er - How.

"This gentleman, Mr. Ronny Banton, has been ever so charming since two years ago. And this little chap, Mr. Roy Merrivale, has actually been ever so charming for a whole month.

"And now, gentlemen, let me present to you Philip, who was ever so charming as much as seven years ago. I brought you here because I thought you should meet each other. And, now that I have got you here, I don't know for the life of me what to do with you." There was a silence ; everyone groped for something to say.

Only Tony seemed to be at his ease.

He looked round at his guests' faces and smiled. Really, they were thinking, Roretton's theatrical sense did lead to some ludicrous situations.

At last Peter said typically : "Who's the man with the story?" There was a pause. Roy said :

"I think I really must go. I've got to see Winners this evening," Phil said quickly :

"Why not play bridge?"

"Yes. Let's play bridge."

Tony took half-a-crown from his pocket.

"And now, Ronny," he said, "since you have not contributed a suggestion, you may go and buy a melon for these charming people."

It was the last evening.

And suddenly, as he walked along the crimson row of secret pines, Tony thought of to-morrow. To-morrow? To-morrow was to be in another world. To-day he was being, for the last time, young. To-day he might be hot and changeful, reckless and passionate ; to-morrow he would be correct and reputable, deliberate and calm. 'Partir, c'est toujours mourir un peu.'

And what of all the past five years was not going to die? What was there substantial enough to withstand even that gentle breeze which was even now coaxing the clouds across that rainy sky? Was there anything that would remain? 'Memories, like tears, rising ; and in the mist of tears, faces.' That was all. That was all that he would take away. Perhaps, too, that was all that he had contributed.

'And in the mist of tears, faces.'

"ἄνδρες γαρ πόλις," said Tony, half aloud. "After all," he thought, "it was a city of marble ; but we came and made it all ice and fire. We found wings for the trees, and for the hedges long, shielding tresses. We gave the buildings spirit ; the Round life ; and the clock significance. We made those lamps flutter and those shadows live. Because we were glad, the moonlight laughed. Because we sang, the shadows danced. We found youth there ; and there we found love. They came with us all the June day long. And now the High Song is over.

"The place, and the people, and the age - these are what we have lost. We may go back to the place, and some of the people may go back with us - but the age we may never regain. And without youth the people are little and the place is nothing.

Because I cannot drink

*There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for
there is nothing again.*

*Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place,
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place.*

"For we, with our tears and our laughter, our gladness and pain, were the place's victory and defeat, its shame and its honour. We were the rustling in its trees, the reflection in its mere, the individuality in its grass. We were the intonation with which the world mentioned the name of Towers Hill.

By what we were, it was known. And now, as far as it is concerned, we are no more. We shall return, and the place will still be beautiful ; but with a detached, impersonal beauty.

"We shall be greeted, but with a distant 'can't quite recollect' welcome. Others will come, and find new significance in the trees and new amazement in the grass. But for us these things will have no meaning.

*"There is no cause for blame, no need for praise now,
Nothing to change, to lose, or to discover.
They were men and women ; they have gone their ways now
As men and women must. The High Song is over."*

'The High Song is over' ; and very faintly there came to him the less than echoes of all the motifs of the Past : 'Fly home, Swanny Butterfly,' blended with the murmur of flies on a June evening by a mere. And 'waiting for the Moon,' with all the crisp impatience of the Yorkshire stars. And 'I'm sitting on top of the world,' a tune that brought back those splendid Sunday walks, when they had tramped together through the dead leaves on Coney, or swung with a prodigious stride

up the hill to Towerston, 'Rolling along, just rolling along.'

And more quietly, and with greater dignity, the primeval air of *Liebesträume*, the air that had belonged so exclusively to Peter - Peter with his hair waving slightly under fluttering lamps, Peter bareheaded beneath the falling dusk of December, Peter with the rain running sullenly off his forehead, and falling on the sodden ground of the most sombre of camps.

And gentler still, and more soothing, the rippling of Chopin's nocturne - restful, warm, unchanging ; not too close in the morning, but in the evening always there to come back to. The nocturne that possessed within itself the unchanging restfulness of Ronny - his warmth, his sympathy, and his quiet, unexotic love.

And lastly, and now terribly, frighteningly loud, the three short-knocks and the longer gigantic blow. The imperative demand for admission, for submission - the inevitable, insistent voice of destiny - the theme of the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven. All other melodies now seemed immersed in this macabre summons. It had swallowed up the old sweet syncopated tunes ; it had drowned *Liebesträume* by its insistence ; by its power it had shivered to atoms the fragile nocturne. Tra la la LA ! Tra la la LA ! Tra la la LA !

Thus Fate knocks upon the door.

Thus Roy bursts into the heart.

He came to a little clearing. The trunk of a fallen pine lay across the pathway. He sat down on it. The old red sunlight wriggled through the tops of the pines in front, and streamed over his head, not heeding him.

A cloud blurred the sunlight : vanished. Tony yearned to feel the sun. He must not waste the good orange light. He stood up ; balanced himself on the pine. He felt the warmth on his hair caressing it. He raised himself on

tiptoe, and the sunbeams swarmed over his face. He was happy. He wanted to see his own face. It would be bright with an unearthly glow. He was implicit in the sun.

He laughed, nearly losing his balance. He had forgotten that he was on tiptoe ; that he had but an unsure footing. The sun breathed heavily into his eyes and vanished. He frowned. The sun was dead.

He turned round : toward the east. There the pines were black ; and the sky above the pines was grey and tattered. No hope, no promise, that way. And yet, there only lay resurrection. Out of the greyness, out of that wilderness of sky, must rise the new day, the new life. To-night he and Roy would pull together the threads of the old life. And to-morrow, from the chaos, from the fragments, a new world must rise. New days for old. Happiness for joy. Age for youth.

He looked down at the pine beneath his feet. Suddenly he understood. He was treading the plank between age and youth. There, at the violet hour, he was looking forward over the grey sea of age, and back upon the white land of youth. He had neither youth nor age ; but, as it were, an after-dinner sleep, dreaming of both.

From between two cloudy eyelids the old sun shot at him one violet glance, and vanished.

For the first time in his life the full impact of the fact of the irrevocable passage of time struck him. He jumped off the trunk of the fallen tree and ran instinctively in the direction of the tents.

It was nightfall ; and the crimson faery pines became black and unextraordinary again. And still Tony walked slowly to and fro in the bracken which bordered on the furthest tents. Night was very close now ; and very

insistent. In the remotest west one streak of day remained. Across a rainy sky the clouds were hurried by the quick and urgent wind. Tony sighed with pleasure ; it was coming just now, His Hour. Anything, no matter how painful, can be borne, so long as it ends with the fullness of joy. In many ways this camp and this last term had hurt a good deal ; but because Roy had virtually promised that their parting should be as Tony, in his most idealistic moments, would have planned it, because Roy had practically said that he would talk away that last night in Tony's tent. Tony was exultantly happy ; happy and ready to face the morrow, for all its loss.

It was in order to make this last night more ideal that Tony had avoided seeing much of Roy that day - had even avoided speaking to him - so much would they have to say that night. And as Tony stood out there in the bracken, in the darkness, and most significantly apart, he heard them in the guard tent still playing the Last Post ; and in the sing-song tent still playing the fool.

Very sincere they sounded - those bugles - sincere, and not a little symbolical. And then, very noisily, they began to come out of the sing-song tent. Soon they would start chairing their officers ; there remained still another hour in which to sit over the port of a flushed sky and discuss probabilities with the goddess Expectation. Tony smiled ; he was about to prove the fallacy of that cynical adage : 'There is nothing so disillusioning as achievement.'

From nowhere and from blackness Ronny was at his side. Tony felt that he ought to be objecting, as this was, of course, contrary to the laws of his idealist code ; still, somehow he didn't mind. He didn't even mind when Ronny began to talk about tents and sergeant-majors, or when, not unintentionally, Ronny's hand brushed his

fingers. Out of the blackness, out of the past, words came back to him : . . . "That of all the things which have been given you for your use, you withhold nothing. Above all, see——" Someone shouted, "Get to your tents there." And the chain of thought was broken.

"Did you see that shooting star?" asked Ronny suddenly.

"No," said Tony. "What does that mean?"

"It means that it's the end," said Ronny queerly. "Oh, no," he added quickly, as he caught Tony's glance, "I mean the end of camp."

And Ronny became one of the obscure figures that passed to and fro before the lighted tents.

And Tony remembered. Here and now ; His Hour. 'Here and to-day ; not then, nor over there.' Tony's tent was directly in front of Roy's ; and Tony stood waiting in the shadow between them. In twelve hours he would be gone hence and be no more seen. But the best — the end — was yet to be.

Would Roy never come? There were so many people who would not see him in the morning and who wanted to say good-bye. Good-bye! What a futile word, unless it is said with something more than the lips! "Good-bye." "Good-bye, Matthews."

At last! Here was Roy.

"Hullo, Roy," said Tony, slipping his arm with unusual naturalness through his, "what was the sing-song like?"

Roy glanced at him. "Rather good," he said.

Tony paused. How much he would enjoy asking this question ; how long he would remember the wonderful answer.

"I must go and get undressed," Roy said at last. Tony smiled. This gave him an opportunity for greater nonchalance.

"All right," Tony called after him, "and, by the way, about what time will you be coming to-night?"

Roy turned and walked back a few paces in Tony's direction.

"I don't know," he said simply. "I'll see how the spirit moves me."

Tony's eyes opened wide. He was astounded at this vagueness. And then, with shattering naturalness, Roy said :

"Probably not at all."

Probably not at all. Tony gasped.

"Roy." Bitterly : "Roy, please. PLEASE. I implore you."

Roy shrugged his shoulders. He said : "I don't think so, Tony."

Tony sighed : turned : went quickly : fell into his tent : blew out the light. "Hell! Oh, damn you, Tony." The others in the tent swore, jostled, hindered. Tony fell headlong on his bed : stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth.

"Keep off my palliasse, damn you."

"Less noise in here." An officer. A cane beat the tent walls. "Less noise. Whose tent is this?"

Silence. Probably not at all.

Someone whispering ; "Roretton's, sir."

Officially : "Roretton, are you there?"

Probably not at all. "Yes."

"Keep your tent quiet, then."

If the spirit moves me. "Yes."

"And 'sir' when you speak to me, please."

Probably not at all. "Keep off my palliasse, damn you." Tony did not answer ; did not hear. His head was outside the tent flap. He was listening to the bugles. 'Lights Out,' they were playing. From beyond the hill and the great gulf that ringed his heart the phantom

bugles of Youth were playing 'Lights Out.' And, hearing them, Tony did not doubt.

Probably not at all. Lights out. Lights out there. Lights out in your tent, Roretton ; oh, yes, in your heart, Roretton. Think those were bugles ? No, no, no. Were Youth. Yearning like a God. Dying in fern. Beyond pinewood. Were death.

Keep off my palliasse, damn you. Put out that flaming light ! Death. Were death. Death, end, the end. This also end. This death. This end too. Probably not at all. Out, out, mad heart, dim candle, damn cad. Damned, ruined pattern.

Of course this was the end. Peras. Peres. My kingdom ! Given to the Persians. Lights out ! Given to the ravens. Lights out, you filthy Persians, won't you ? Probably not at all. Look ! don't you see what you've done ? No, no. Beethoven, he was blind. Couldn't see. Don't blame him, poor devil. Keep off my palliasse, damn you. Out of Israel, you Philistines. Whose breath is that ? Beethoven's. Roretton's mad. Beethoven's bloody. Will you keep off my palliasse ? Probably. Not at all.

Roretton they said if you don't keep off my palliasse you'll have all the flaming hypes down on your head Roretton d'you hear keep off my palliasse damn you keep your bloody feet still can't you see you're trampling on my hand.

Lights out ! All lights out ! Stop talking in that tent. Not. Probably. At all.

Silence. Star lightly falling. Men among khaki, snoring. Fœtid limbs among kitbags, lying.

Broken, brittle heart ? Whisper.

Broken. Stony broke.

Broken ? Then let's go. Let's go away. Finished. Exit. Let's get out of this. Out of tents. Out of Israel.

Out of worlds. Out of the year. Get into palliasse. Spring's gone ahead. Bolted. Given us the lead. Winter in the world. Winter in the heart. Let's get away. Come on ! Turn out God's guard !

Halt ! who goes there ? Foe. Foe with seven *fiancés*. Who goes there ? Youth - and a broken heart. Pass, Youth.

Pass, pass, sweet palliasse.

Thanks, Supreme Sentry.

Come, Chaos, come again.

"Keep off my palliasse, Roretton, damn you."

Go back to sleep. It's midnight. Sleep. Count ten. And sleep.

He waited : untied the string : opened the palliasse : put his head in. Dust and lice ! Took it out. What's this on cheek ? Wetness. Put in, put in, head-coward.

The boy on left, mumbling : "For God's sake be careful of straw." He was a silly little boy ; and sleeping.

What this ? What these on cheek ? What blobs of wet ? Blobs of blub ! I know not what they mean. Idle. Idle.

If this boy were not so idle, he could do well. Do well ! Thou hast done well by water. He could have done well once with Latin or water.

Now - will make best of straw.

Put in, put in, Tony, mad heart, old boy. Prepare attack valley.

Ach. Ach. Ach. Prepare die dawn. Ach. Ach. Ach. Before dawn. Ach. Be man of stone. Of straw. Man's come to worse than straw they said lights out heart straw catches they said. Ope mouth tie string pull palliasse damn you. Smothering tight. Take bullet in brain. Ach ! lad. Ach's the stuff. Suff. Ach ! Suffoc. Suffoc. Ating. Rhythm.

In Suffolk by the sea.

I met Marie.
Suffocated.
Tra la la la.
SSUFF-OC-AT-ED.
SAD. Sad, Mary.
Only son. Noosed. . . . Only. . . . Keep off my . . .
Death.

The end.

Memory, with its pain, had left him.

Still lay the foetid limbs among kitbags ; more still the foetid limbs among straw. Straw eyes : straw mouth : straw nostrils : still heart of straw.

Still while stars danced : while, in the tent behind, Roy opened eyes to catch a glimpse of the vanishing trail. In the tent in front of him that charming, but too theatrical Tony would now be asleep. He turned over on the other side.

A minute – and Roy slept.

And Tony. He was also asleep.

Three hours – and Tony Roretton came to himself. As he pulled the filthy straws out of his mouth he knew that he was not dead. Not dead ! And it did not take him long to realise that his heart was not broken. It was merely frozen. That was all.

He felt profoundly foolish.

It was evident that beyond the conscious line of melodrama and self-deception (even of sincere melodrama) there was an infallible bank of subconscious prudence. This suicide business was not so easy as it appeared. Somehow the string had come undone ; the blankets had fallen off. (Not dead !) The hated morrow had to be faced. Well, he would act it out.

He would not say good-bye. No . . . that might be thought mere carelessness. No ; better to go up and then refuse to shake hands ; to turn with a gesture and

walk away. Or perhaps . . . he thought of some cutting, theatrical phrase ; some Parthian arrow.

" You are the cruellest person I have ever known." Or, shorter and better, " You are cruelty itself."

And, burying his face again in the offending straw, he sighed and slept.

White and candid broke the dawn ; and Réveillé sounded. Tony opened his eyes. Strangely, he did not even think of Roy. He dressed hurriedly. There was hardly time to join the squad for the London train. He crawled out of the tent. It was a wonderfully fresh morning. A streak of clean sunlight lay, like a yellow sheet, along the lines.

Somehow Tony felt different.

It was so real, that sunlight, so incisive, so penetrating, so unpretending. It was too potent a spotlight for any acting, too piercing for any deception. The sun and Roy had beaten him at the last.

His squad was falling in. There was Roy. . . . What had he decided on ? Ah ! Yes ! " You are cruelty itself."

He walked up to him. He tried to feel broken ; tried to look downcast ; tried to control his words. It was no good. It was the sun's fault.

" Good-bye, Roy," he said simply. " Expect I shall see you some time."

But deep down in his being he knew that he must never see Roy again : that it was good-bye not only to Roy, but to all that. ' Never from a friend.' Kitson had been right after all.

And before Roy could answer, Tony had fallen in with his squad. Around and over him fell the clean, clear light.

And Tony knew that, though he himself had risen anew from his attempted suicide, nevertheless a considerable

part of his being had died in the night ; and for that part there would be no resurrection.

A whistle blew - a real, unromantic note. And, shouldering his substantial kitbag, Tony turned his face to the east and marched off into the rising sun.

THE END